

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-5**  
**May 20, 2025**  
**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 Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**Acting City Manager, Joe L. Gomez**  
**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Deputy City Attorney, Stephanie Throckmorton**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Maria Cruz**  
**Robert Ruano**  
**Elaine de Valle**

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**Agenda Item E-5 [3:03 p.m.]**

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1- “ Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 13, 2027 to November 03, 2026 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a four (4) month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four (4) weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to five (5) weeks after the General Election; amending Section 3 “Election to Office; Commission As Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter Amendments

*City Commission Meeting*

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[Date]

1

pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: E-5.

City Attorney Suarez: E-5 is an Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1- “Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 13, 2027 to November 03, 2026 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a four (4) month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four (4) weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to five (5) weeks after the General Election; amending Section 3 “Election to Office; Commission As Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter Amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Thank you. Stephanie Throckmorton, Deputy City Attorney. This is returning to you this item amends our Charter as permissible under state law to move the election date from April 13, 2027, to November 3, 2026, and changing the date of all subsequent elections to November of even numbered years. This would result in a four-month reduction of existing terms of office rather than being sworn in, in April of 2027, members would be sworn in, in December of 2026. We believe this is permissible under various Florida Statutes that allows Commission to change the date of their election to either extend or shorten terms of office and to provide for the orderly transition, based on that election change. So, this would change the Charter itself to November of even numbered years elections.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, Mrs. Maria Cruz. I’m sorry, Mr. Mayor, while Mrs. Cruz is coming up, I did not get a motion.

Mayor Lago: Can I have a motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I’ll make the motion. I’ll make one comment before we vote.

Commissioner Lara: Second.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

*City Commission Meeting*

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Once again, when we used to sit at somebody's dining table in the City of Coral Gables, we always bragged about the fact that we were not the same as every other city around us or near us or whatever, and for obvious reasons, because this was one of the items that people were available to sign and they couldn't come up with a lot of certifiable signatures, I think that, I guess we forget that we're living in the City of Coral Gables. Maybe we should be incorporated or annexed by Miami, we'll do the same way.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Quickly. I originally brought this item almost a year and-a-half ago, if memory serves me correctly, and I had the choice to make whether it would be proper for me, myself and I to lengthen my term in office by moving the election or shorten it, and I say the people didn't vote for me to have a longer term, so the proper thing to do is shorten it by just a few months. Now the lengthening of the term, and City Attorney, you know this off the top of your head better than I do, a year plus, wasn't it?

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Twenty months would be to extend the term from April 27 to November of 28.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So almost two years, as opposed to just shaving off four months.

Deputy City Attorney Throckmorton: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct. Okay. The other thing is the voters have spoken in many different ways. When they came forward and spoke in favor during the time that this item was under consideration, it was overwhelming support by people and mothers holding children, on their hips, talking on Zoom and otherwise said, let's make it easier for people to vote. The other thing is, we just had an election of knocked thousands of doors. Overwhelmingly, even people that had previously wanted to keep it in April when they heard that the turnout for elections is so much easier and its not a partisan issue, we elect our County Commissioners at the same November elections. So, we have non-partisan elections in the same time period. We shouldn't have to go through the hassle of having people knock our doors and put flyers on our windows and signs all over the place. We can enjoy April, we can take vacations in April, we can go on vacation with our kids when they are on spring break, go visit our grandchildren. Instead of having to worry about whether or not we are going to be able to make it back and have an election done on a timely basis, because you are already going to be at the polls. Three more bubbles is not that difficult. We have a very highly educated electorate and we should be encouraging people to vote, not

*City Commission Meeting*

[Date]

3

May 20, 2025

Agenda Item E-5 – Ordinance amending Section 1-“Creation-Composition-Election-Terms Vacancies-Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election”

discouraging people to vote, because if you are discouraging people to vote and try to place elections in a time period it is less convenient for people to vote, you are suppressing the vote and I don't believe that our government should ever try to suppress the vote. Are you starting the roll call.

Mayor Lago: Not yet. We are in discussion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. I'm sorry. I was on a roll.

Mayor Lago: No worries.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: When the Vice Mayor says residents have spoken. I remember this item coming up to the Commission and if, I'm probably too late right now, but we could probably get a public record with the amount of emails, because I remember me printing out the stack of emails saying, please do not change our elections to November, keep our elections in April, and then suddenly things have changed, but I really don't see the residents speaking as far as change your, at least they haven't spoken to me, they haven't reached out to me. The people who have reached out to me are the people asking me, which I have proof and on the record emails, do not change, leave our elections in April. We all know that this is not really about saving \$200,000. This is about drowning the voices of the people. This is about only letting well-funded candidates run city government. I have spoken about this; I don't know how many times. I wrote an opinion in the Miami Herald. I wrote another one in the Miami Community Newspaper. I have addressed this in Town Halls with residents' numerous times, but for some weird reason, this keeps on coming up and coming up and coming up. I don't agree with it. I don't think its in the best interest of the city. \$200,000 is almost nothing compared to our budget, so when we are saying we are here to save \$200,000, I find that very dishonest and I'm done. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Sir.

Commissioner Lara: May I. So, to your point, Commissioner, right, that you say you have not heard from the people whether or not it's a good thing to move the elections to November of even dates. We had the largest Run-Off election turnout in the history of Coral Gables on April 22 of this year; 4,358 people voted against the concept of leaving it in April of odd years, because I ran on this point. My clear over a year platform was, we must move the elections to November of even years, because Coral Gables votes. It is not quantity over quality, but Coral Gables votes, over 80 percent in November of even years, and in a good year you might get somewhere between 17 and 20 percent of the registered electorate that turns out in April. So clearly, there is something about

*City Commission Meeting*

[Date]

4

May 20, 2025

Agenda Item E-5 – Ordinance amending Section 1- "Creation-Composition-Election-Terms Vacancies-Qualifications" and Section 1.1 "Run-Off Election"

April that makes it a hardship, I would say for single mothers, for example, who have to deal with children during spring break, or when its Easter, as one of the Run-Off early election days fell this year. I had residents who were coming off of a cruise ship, catching a plane, because their spring break and private school breaks was that same week, that's when they are trying to get their votes in, which would not have occurred in a November even year scenario. So, I think that the point is, rather than saying that you're looking at this as drowning out the voices, I see it as making it easier for those voices to be heard by providing the most accessible, broad-based, and convenient way to be heard, and when you have more people voting you have a clear image of what it is that the people really want, and when they come out in record numbers that they did in this last Run-Off election, it is not because they wanted more of the same, I would submit, but rather they were looking for change. So, a promise was made, and a promise is being delivered here today.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I don't think we need to rehash everything that we discussed last time. My vote is no simply because I think this is a decision that any Charter change should be made by the voters and this question should be answered by the voters, whether they want to make that change or not. It should not be made up here on the dais.

Mayor Lago: My vote is going to be to support this and its very simple. We are not drowning anyone out, just think about it. When Ariel Fernandez and Melissa Castro were elected, it was the lowest voter turnout in 25 years, we had immense voter turnout. The whole point is to get more people to come out and vote, because I trust the voter to make the right decision. We have a very educated voter base here in the city that takes pride in engaging and serving, so the idea that we're drowning people out by more people coming out to vote just doesn't make sense. I was very thoughtful during the election, and I didn't use, for example, like a People Count USA-type model to go after polling data. I actually hired a national company from Washington to be able to review what the individuals in this community thought about a November election. Over 70 percent of individuals were in favor of a November election, and that was validated as the Vice Mayor and Commissioner Lara said, when we walked thousands of homes where people said, why are elections in April. So, maybe for you its not about the \$200,000, but it is about \$200,000, that's a lot of money, that's the people's money, but its about more involvement, not drowning people out. I want people to be engaged, to participate in the process. So, my vote is a yes very clearly.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor before I call the roll, I did receive a message from a resident on Zoom which I missed, if you would allow for them to speak on public comment.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Clerk Urquia: Its from Mr. Robert Ruano and he is on Zoom.

*City Commission Meeting*

Mr. Ruano: Good afternoon, Mayor, Commissioners again. I wasn't going to talk about this, but I did want to bring something up and maybe its more of a question than anything. We assigned a Charter Review Committee, I wasn't on it, I really didn't follow them, but I was curious as to what the Charter Review Committee said about these issues. Personally, I support November election, I don't have an issue with it, but we did put a Charter Review Committee together, but I've seen a lot of items, including this one that are making Charter changes when we already have a process in place. We brought this committee in, and we should be listening to them as to recommendations and I don't hear in any of these saying, okay, this is what the Charter Review Committee thought. So that's my two cents on that. Thank you and good luck.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, would you do me a favor.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Would you please send Mr. Ruano all the Charter Review videos, so he has them at his disposal and he can review them. And again, be clear, the Charter Review was compromised, because this Commission, three votes out of the five removed two votes on that Charter Review, they went from seven to five, and the intent was to have more control. The last three Charter Reviews had seven members, and this was done every ten years. This was rushed to have it done now in eight years. So, I welcome the Charter Review. They have yet to complete their review. They are more than welcome to give us their guidance. I welcome it.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have one more speaker, Ms. Elaine de Valle. Ma'am, go ahead.

Ms. de Valle: Good afternoon, everybody. First time I speak at a Commission meeting and its because I had a question. After the last Commission meeting about this item, I've asked it of the City Attorney, I've asked it of several city staff. No body seems to be able to answer me, so maybe you can answer me here in the public forum. There is a whereas on this that says that there will be a public vote at a later date for affirmation. I guess it's a two-part question; affirmation necessary and if the public votes no what happens then?

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney. Can we please close the public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam City Attorney, as we've discussed on multiple occasions.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, I think that the intent has changed a little bit. Its no longer putting it to an affirmation of the voters, but there is another related item, its F-14, which does call for a Special Election and a ballot question put to the voters, and obviously when we call that one up, we will explain what the question is and what the impact of it will be, but if this ordinance is adopted today on second reading, the one that we are considering right now, it will change the date

*City Commission Meeting*

of the election, unless there is subsequent action from the Commission to undo that, but as of today it will be a change to a November election.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk, can we get a roll call please.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: No

Commissioner Fernandez: No

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 3-2)