

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-10
February 27, 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

Interim City Manager, Alberto Parjus

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Amos Rojas, Jr.

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item F-10 [3:42 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

(Co-sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item F-10.

City Attorney Suárez: F-10 is a resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, I asked to co-sponsor this because it was something I spoke about. You know, I do believe in a proper succession plan. It was something that I was definitely in favor of. And I've heard a lot from residents as well and they do concur that we need to do a professional search. We need background checks. We need to -- the suggestions have been made to first look locally because at least locally people are familiar with Miami-Dade County nuances that we have to deal with the County, that we have to deal with the State, we have to deal with DERM, we have to deal with all these different disciplines in South Dade to deal with. And I also think that we need -- we had a speaker come here today also suggest that we have, you know, an independent committee. But like everything, you have to have those that are qualified. For our departments to be able to move smoothly going forward, I do think that our department heads do need to ascertain if this person has the requisite knowledge and experience to be able to, you know, work on the budget and work on all the various things that come through at that breakneck pace that our former ACM had highlighted. So I do think we need to get going as quickly as possible for the benefit of our community so we don't have any further delays moving forward and that we do so in a comprehensive way because a methodology where you just, you know, someone's leaving somewhere, you might inherit somebody else's problems. And I've seen enough -- I have enough experience in life to know that what things look like on the outside may not be what's really going on. So, we need to have those probing questions asked of any candidate, along with the background checks to make sure we're not inheriting someone else's problems. And this is not directed at any particular persons whose names have come up. This is really just to make sure that we get the best for our city going forward and that we don't have any further delays.

Mayor Lago: So, as the co-sponsor of this item, I think I agree wholeheartedly with you. I just wanted to add a few points. I think that having spoken to a lot of the staff -- I haven't met one of the staff -- from, you know, an employee who -- who is -- from all walks of life, along with residents and business owners, they've all been very clear that, you know, the clear opportunity here is to use an executive search firm. We want to hear from staff and see what staff's opinion is moving forward. We want it to be independent. We want to make sure that it's something that, again, does an in-depth, thorough, thorough background check on the individuals that are being considered. That doesn't preclude anybody from joining the process, submitting their names from the Commission, saying I'm interested in this person in a very -- you know, you can do it in a discreet way. You can speak with the ACM, with the current City Manager. You can speak to one of the professionals, whatever way that you think is appropriate. Because again, we also have individuals who, one of the things that I've heard is that people want to be careful because a lot of people are employed. And when you're employed currently, you may have an interest in this position, but you also want to be as careful and thoughtful in regards to your current employer. You don't want to rock the boat. And that is something that I heard of in the last two searches that I was involved in, where people said, listen, I'm interested, but I just want to make sure that the process is very, very thoughtful and that it takes into account a person's current employment if there are -- there is interest. I have a feeling that we'll have people who are interested in this position. I just think that to draw the most people and to send a strong message that it's an even

playing field, I think using an executive search firm is something that'll tell people, listen, we're going to cast a wide net, and you know, everybody has a fair shot at this job. We're just looking for the best person to serve this community. Commissioner?

Commissioner Fernandez: I have a few remarks. I've also been approached by many residents and there are some concerns in the community. I have to start by thanking our Interim City Manager who stepped up to the plate and things haven't skipped a beat. So, appreciate the service you've given us regardless of the time or what you're doing, you've answered the calls and I appreciate that. Last Commission meeting, this Commission voted to begin discussions with a preferred candidate to potentially make that person our next city manager. But we had a problem. The next day an anonymous text was sent out disparaging that candidate. Who sent it? You're big on transparency. Would you like to share it with us?

Mayor Lago: Are you saying that I sent it?

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not saying. I'm asking.

Mayor Lago: You're looking at me.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, it's a rhetorical question...

Mayor Lago: If anything...

Commissioner Fernandez: Because I think we all know...

Mayor Lago: If anything...

Commissioner Fernandez: Where it came from.

Mayor Lago: If anything, you're accusing me again. I did not send that text message. And as a person who knows you...

Commissioner Fernandez: Alright, well, it's on the record.

Mayor Lago: As a person who know you very well, and again, it's a I continued chipping -- a continued chipping at my integrity and who I am. What we haven't -- what we have here, Commissioner, is a great opportunity. Leave -- leave the games behind and move on to find somebody (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: But you're interrupting me. As you said, you're not supposed to, right?

Mayor Lago: You accused me of writing a...

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm ask -- I asked you a question.

Mayor Lago: You accused me of -- I have to answer when you accuse me.

Commissioner Fernandez: I also think it would be important for residents to know the message you sent to the candidate. Through a mutual friend, you said if he took the job, you would, and I quote, "Make his life a living hell." That is...

Mayor Lago: Again, let me just -- again, if you're making that statement, I did not make that statement. What I said was very clear, and I've said it to everybody. The best way to do this is to use a national search firm and go in a way that is transparent and it's an open process where everybody can have a bite of the apple and it's the best candidate for the City. You can continue to blame me for somebody not coming here, but at the end of the day, it was their decision not to come here.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm going to continue with my remarks.

Mayor Lago: Perfect, please.

Commissioner Fernandez: You've been censured for less...

Commissioner Menendez: If I may, I can confirm that a message with those wordings was communicated.

Mayor Lago: I didn't say that.

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: You've been censured for less than that, but your hatred clearly makes it impossible for you to think rationally sometimes. You think that lobbying threats and trying to intimidate people into doing what you want makes you a strong mayor. It doesn't. The City's Charter states that you're equal to the other four of us who have been elected to this body. And no matter how many times you ignore our presence, you disparage us when you lose a vote, or lie about us, it will not change the fact that you are here to serve alongside us as equals. However, you weren't the only one who disparaged this candidate. The Vice Mayor stated here on the record that the candidate had been fired and that's why he was seeking this job. Nothing can be further from the truth. He's still working for Miami-Dade County and people are very happy that he is there trying to address the issues at the airport.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll respond to your accusation. I can only repeat what I am told. I heard that, you know, he wasn't leaving as well during our break. A lot of things are heard. I also

received a message from Commissioner Cabrera expressing displeasure in the manner in which certain members of this Commission -- and they know who they are -- went around the County's back directly trying to negotiate away one of their employees. So, we can continue on with this gamesmanship if you wish, or we can get to the matter at hand, which is we need to find a qualified candidate for this position. You know, grandstanding like this does not move our city forward. It's embarrassing for our city. It may make you feel good. It may make you feel important. It may make you think that you're doing a wonderful thing for your constituency, but you're doing exactly the opposite for our constituency. So, the question remains, how do you want to proceed going forward?

Commissioner Fernandez: Can I continue with my statement?

Vice Mayor Anderson: You -- I'm asking you a question.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I...

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're asking me a question. You made an accusation against me that is utterly false. There was a lot of things that happened during that Commission meeting with utterly false statements. And for you to come in here and accuse me of making a false statement based upon something that I was told and merely truthfully reporting to you all is a shame for this community. It's very, very disparaging. And I would like to move forward with a search rather than playing this game of trying to make one person look more important or how many times you want to get in front of a camera and preach to the community that you're supposed to be the savior here, trying to save things. Do you want to search for a new manager or do you want to waste time with this?

Commissioner Fernandez: I want to finish my remarks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Go right ahead.

Commissioner Fernandez: And your answer will be -- will be heard in a few seconds. This behavior is a clear sign that we need a manager who can deal with threats, lies and intimidation tactics and is unfazed by them. Over the last few months, I've come up with a list of qualities I believe a manager would need to have. These include respect -- I don't want to interrupt your call.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead, Commissioner. It was an error. I pressed the wrong button. I apologize.

Commissioner Fernandez: Those include respect for others, the ability to handle crisis situations, the ability to lead by example, would faithfully follow the Charter, Code, procedures, and directives of this Commission, and who has no ties to the special interests or developers who seek to control City Hall as evidenced here last meeting. As luck would have it, I had someone reach out to me with an interest in the position who meets these requirements. This individual has served

in leadership roles from the local level to the state level to the federal level. This individual also has the knowledge and ability to address the number one concern our residents have today -- is there public corruption in Coral Gables? This is the pressing concern that we must take to the forefront as this Commission. In the 10 months I've been here, I've had many concerns myself with the information I've been provided by brave members of staff and the community who have shared very concerning stories of their experiences with our city's government. We must look into these concerns and ensure our city is clean of impropriety and corruption and that our processes are being faithfully followed. The candidate I'm bringing to you for your consideration today is a graduate of Coral Gables Senior High School. He's an alumni of Miami Dade College, where he has been enshrined into their Hall of Fame. His career has taken him through many key roles in leadership, including eight years as a special agent in charge of the Miami Regional Operations Center for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, two years as deputy director of the South Florida Money Laundering Strike Force of the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, and for four and a half years, he served under two U.S. presidents as U.S. Marshal of the sixth largest U.S. Marshal Service District in the country, the Southern District of Florida. This gentleman commands respect because he gives respect. He commands hard work because he puts in hard work. He believes a solution to a problem can most of the time be found in being faithful to the ordained process. A man dedicated to service and to his family, someone who can lead this city as we end our first centennial and ensure the clean start of our second. With that I would make a motion for this Commission to name Amos Rojas Jr. Coral Gables' next city manager. I've asked Mr. Rojas to accompany us today to introduce himself and answer any questions the Commission may have.

Commissioner Castro: I'm sorry, can you repeat the name?

Commissioner Fernandez: Amos Rojas Jr.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Thank you for that, I appreciate that. With that being said, there's a motion on the floor. Is there a second? Just to respect the process, the way that this works. We can do this for discussion, if you'd like, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I...

Mayor Lago: Or is that...?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Again, I prefer the normal process. A background check needs to be run.

Mayor Lago: Vice Mayor, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I apologize. I don't want to get -- later say that I give you fair treatment -- you know, that I give you more treatment than they do, so I want to be very fair to everybody.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sure, that's fine.

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Mayor Lago: Okay, we have a motion on the floor. We have a motion on the floor. We're not going to vote on it. We're just going to have a discussion. Is there --? Can I have a second? Or just a no. If there's not, then it just dies.

Commissioner Castro: I'll go ahead and second that.

Mayor Lago: Discussion.

Commissioner Castro: And I feel that a U.S. Marshal, really what background are you going to do? I mean, that I think is sufficient background as it is. But that -- I'll second that.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, with that being said, Vice Mayor, I apologize. I just want to be fair. Because then they say I'm not fair.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. So, I'm familiar with the job that a U.S. Marshal does, and it's a very different job than being a city manager. And I've dealt with the U.S. Marshal Service because I have done asset collection, asset sales, those types of things with U.S. Marshal Services, so it goes beyond custody issues. It goes more into asset sales as well. It's a very different job, extremely different job than being a city manager. Without having a résumé, without having an opportunity to sit down and speak to this individual on an in-depth level, this sounds no different than what happened the last meeting around. This is not a thoughtful process. This is not a process where we have input from the community, which we had a speaker come here, Mr. Wells came here and asked for that as well. It's a surprise. And why should it be that way when we should be more considerate about the process that we're doing? What experience and background in education does this individual have in finance? What education background and experience does this person have with Public Works, with all the different disciplines that we have coming into --? That's -- I'm fine. It's wonderful. It's a pleasure to meet him, but I'd like to be able to sit down with him in my office, have an interview, get to know you. I'm very familiar with the criminal justice system. I'm very familiar with the asset forfeiture issues, et cetera, but to make a decision without having an opportunity to be able to speak with you on a one-to-one basis and throw you into the mix of this, I don't think is the right way to do this. I think, you know, my preference is, if I was sitting in -- standing in your shoes, to have the opportunity to speak to every single member of this Commission, get to know us, make sure that you're comfortable with the position and don't regret making a move somewhere down the line. So, that's my preference. Love to have you. Once we have this conversation, once we go over the various different issues that are presented in a city government, that is drastically different than the federal government. I'm familiar with both and they're different worlds. So, there's my comments on this.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Vice Mayor. Commissioner Menendez, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Commissioner Menendez: I'm just listening for now.

Mayor Lago: Okay, I don't -- I don't have anything. I just want to make sure that you guys are done or don't have anything else to say before I -- before I say -- you have something? Go ahead.

Commissioner Castro: No, no. Thank you for coming. Actually, what a surprise. I've never met you, but I was looking you up and I saw that the picture that I was looking at was the person coming in through the door. So, what a surprise. I don't know if you caught this, but I seconded that motion. I'll put on the record; I've never spoken to you. I've never met you. I'm looking here at your LinkedIn and it's very impressive. Retired FDLE Special Agent in Charge, Miami Regional Operations Center, South Florida Money Laundering, and Deputy Director, very impressive, all qualities that I would like the new city manager to possess and to have, especially given the circumstances that I believe that we are in.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, just to...

Mayor Lago: Are you -- are you done?

Commissioner Fernandez: Oh, just to answer a couple of the questions that the Vice Mayor brought up. Regarding the background check, Mr. Amos, I believe, still has an active top secret security clearance.

Amos Rojas: If I may come forward?

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's fine. Again, I just prefer to have a face-to-face meeting with you than an interview in the middle of a meeting.

Mr. Rojas: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: My friend, if I may, just with all due respect, we've never met. This has never been done before in this fashion. I've never even shaken your hand. You're probably a wonderful individual who's competent, who's capable and can do a great job. But we have a Commission meeting that the intent, as a reasonable person who's held the amazing positions that you've held, you understand that there's a process. You were hired for your job. I'll give you an example. When you were hired for your job, there was an interview process, correct?

Mr. Rojas: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: There was an interview process, correct, sir?

Mr. Rojas: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: And there was multiple people that were considered. And there was -- and there was a process that, again, was publicized. And people were able to engage in that position. And people were able to say I'm interested in that position and throw their hat into the ring. All I'm saying is, again, we don't have the votes. I don't have the votes. This is a standard 3-2 vote as it's been for the last few months, and it's perfectly fine. This is the way it's going to be, and it's fine. But all I'm saying is what I told previous people who consider this position, which I met with another gentleman who was also being considered for this position, and I took him to breakfast, and I said, the best way to move forward as a community to build consensus around the city manager is not for having one person pick the city manager. It's for it to be done by an outside agency. And I request and I ask you to please put your name into the mix. Get involved. You know, give us all your credentials, give us your résumé. But to come here today as a person of your caliber, you know that you're going to be dealing with five different people, you're going to be dealing with a city with over a thousand employees. It's a completely different scenario than what you've been in. And the best way, in my opinion, to be the recipient of city manager is to -- having gone through a rigorous process. It's not only about background checks. It's about a rigorous process where the entire Commission, when we come together and we make a decision based on a person's credentials. Not assigned a person who walks in the door because I don't think you've ever gotten a job like that. I've never gotten a job like that in my life, walking in. So, I'm just giving you the utmost respect and I'm just saying that it -- this is...

Mr. Rojas: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Commissioner Castro: Through...

Commissioner Menendez: And by the way...

Commissioner Castro: I'm sorry, through the Mayor, there's a motion and there's a second, therefore, it allows public comment. And I would consider him as public comment to be able to come up and express or answer questions.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I'm not denying him that.

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I'm not denying. What I'm saying is there's a process and I would love nothing more than to not taint the process for you to potentially get involved where -- one second, sir. One second, one second. For you not to taint the process of getting involved as a potential candidate for city manager with an outside firm that comes in, which is the way it's always been done, and I think the most appropriate way that it's been done.

Mr. Rojas: And rather than going to the prepared speech that I had, let me just say this. I'm not a politician. Your process is your process. I'm interested in the position because I believe that I can add value to the City of Coral Gables. How this process works, it's really up to you. So, what I hear you saying, Mr. Mayor, is you know, you're interested in the job but we're going to do something else. That's your right. I'm just here saying that I'm interested, I can do the job, I think I'm the right person for the position at this time. But again, not being a politician, I leave that up to the elected officials.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rojas: And I would love to meet individually with all of you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Mr. Mayor, when you say tainting the process, you did that when you threatened our last candidate.

Mayor Lago: I did not threaten anybody.

Commissioner Fernandez: You did, sir. We -- two of us...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Have heard it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Two of us have heard it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I did not...

Commissioner Fernandez: Two of us have heard it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I did not...

Commissioner Fernandez: And by the way, I know from personal experience...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner...

Commissioner Fernandez: That's how you operate.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, just so you...

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Commissioner Fernandez: Let me finish.

Mayor Lago: No, hold on. No, because you're stating that I made it...

Commissioner Fernandez: You did.

Mayor Lago: Stop for a second. Commissioner, I've worked with you for years. I've known every trick, every email you sent, every way that you can negotiate. You're saying that I do things that you do. You're saying that you're threatened, but you never put one police, one, one -- as the gentleman in law enforcement knows, if there's a threat, then there has to be a police report. Not one police report was done. So, my point is, let's hand to the gentleman here you brought before, I think, the least we can show the respect that he deserves, okay? My point was very simple. I was just trying to move forward to make sure that you, when I said taint, was that you did not stand up here, make a statement, and then if we go a different route, if we go a different route to go through a standard process where you bring in an outside consulting firm to basically grab as many résumés as possible of qualified people to consider them that nobody could come and say, hey, he got -- he got -- he got, you know, preferential treatment because he came before the Commission or something like that. It's not about tainting the process. It's about -- I wanted to make sure you were on equal -- an equal playing field of everybody to be considered. But at the end of the day, like I said before, the votes are the votes. And you said it's our process. You said that you wanted -- you said you wanted to have -- you wanted to recognize the Vice Mayor. I have nothing else to say.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, I wanted to answer the Vice Mayor's concerns. So, the first one was on the background check. The second was South Florida connections. This individual has been working in South Florida for several decades through Miami-Dade County, South Miami, the FDLE. He handled our southern region. As a U.S. Marshal, he handled the southern region. He's worked with our police chief before on multi-agency issues. He's the one who headed up the 9/11 terrorist task force for the state of Florida. He's the one that created the Blue Alert for police officers, similar to the Amber Alert. This is somebody who's been dedicated to this community and has gotten a lot of things done in management roles for over 30 years. So, you say he's not qualified to be the manager, which is your third point.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I didn't say that he's not qualified. We need to evaluate, okay? And I'm totally familiar with the entire criminal system because I've worked in it for 37 years. And I'm telling you it's different working here. And I'd like to have a conversation with you to make sure that you're best equipped going forward because making a decision here without having an opportunity to speak to you, you know, I'm happy to sit down and try to educate you on some areas that you would be beyond what you would deal with in FDLE, went beyond what you would deal with in U.S. Marshal's Office. And I've dealt with HSI, ATF, CBP, TTB. I've dealt with all the federal agencies and I've been all the way around the country on various litigation matters,

both civil and criminal, Court of International Trade. We all bring with us different education, background, and experience. And I think to have the trust of the community, if your process is used where it's a normal process, there's an application procedure, you get interviewed. Like I said in the last meeting last week, I don't know if you had an opportunity to listen to that presentation. It would be...

Mr. Rojas: Last meeting?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Last meeting.

Mr. Rojas: This is the first time (INAUDIBLE).

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so you know, it would be beneficial for you to listen to that because what I said is I wanted a normal succession plan. That I had conversations with our then City Manager who was 68 years old that we needed to have a succession plan. I wanted him to be able to bring somebody in, get them onboarded, whether it's a six-month, a year, to where we're comfortable, so someone's just not thrown into the rapids dealing with issues you've never dealt with and never had to deal with working in the positions that you -- that you did. There's so many layers of process. DERM, EPA, other types of issues. This is not the place to do an interview.

Mr. Rojas: I can't argue with what you're saying. What I can tell you is this. I've always, in my experience, surrounded myself with professional folks that know how to do the job. I don't need to be an engineer to know that I can select a good engineer that gives good advice, and I listen to the advice, and then I make the final decision. I'm a consensus builder. I don't make decisions on the fly. You know, the days of hurricane disasters and deploying state resources to different areas, sheriffs yelling, hey, I need more people, and I don't have the people, those days are gone. I have now the luxury of being able to look at a problem, listen to the experts, because I am not an expert. I couldn't tell you the traffic pattern and flow of the traffic coming through Dade County. What's the transient population or the work population in the Gables? How is that affecting the flow of traffic? But what I do know is reach out to the individuals that have the information and put that information to work. And then at the end of the day, as I understand it, in this type, form of government, you're my boss. You come to me and you ask me to do things and we'll get things done. That's one thing I always do. I get things done. One way or the other, we'll get it done. But if you're asking for, you know, for me to be an engineer or a waste management, you know, professional, that's not me. You've got the wrong person. If you're looking for someone that's going to take a city, the departments that fall under the manager's purview, and focus their attention on the importance of what needs to be done for the City of Coral Gables, basically making sure everybody is rowing, heading in the same direction, and the rows are going -- the oars are turning at the same rate. That I can do for you, or I can do for the City. I'll be very honest with you. I was not looking for a job. I'm happy where I was, but friends of ours called and said, hey, you are perfect for this position. Of course, they're biased because they're personal friends of mine. So -

- and would you be interested in it? And here I am. I'm fine either way. Again, I reiterate what I said earlier. This is your process. However you all want to do it, I'm just a candidate.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no, and I understand. And I'd love to sit down and interview as a candidate. With all due respect, you can be a great manager. (INAUDIBLE) lawyer on major cases. Three, four months in trial. You don't become able to try that case in the first week. You have to have time to get onboarded, and that's part of the process that needs to be done. Plus, you want the trust of the community.

Mr. Rojas: Well, (INAUDIBLE)...

Vice Mayor Anderson: This Commission may not be here tomorrow. You need the trust of the community that know that you got hired through a process that they had an opportunity to look at as well. Because they don't know you. Okay, and I know you're highly respected and I'm highly respected in my field too. But I still have to go through an interview process for every single client that I work for. Okay, and they have to have an opportunity to do that, not just picked out of a hat. And that's essentially what this is. This is the first time I've heard your name. I don't have your résumé, okay?

Mr. Rojas: I'm sorry that's the case that's the first time you've heard my name.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, listen, I've litigated in multiple states throughout the United States, including the local venue, okay? From New York to California to Washington State, Texas, et cetera and so on. So, I deal with a lot of different departments and a lot of different agencies, but a thoughtful process should be used here. Why? You want the trust of the people. You don't want just the trust of this Commission. You want the trust of the people moving forward. Because tomorrow someone might say, well, jeez, they just picked the name out of a hat and that Commissioner's gone, so now, you know, you start to experience...

Mr. Rojas: (INAUDIBLE) say that -- some may say that, but I don't think I'll have any issues not only earning the respect of the community, earning the respect of the Commission and of the members of the City of Coral Gables. I don't see that as a problem.

Mayor Lago: May I ask you a question?

Mr. Rojas: That's never been my...

Mayor Lago: May I ask you a question, sir?

Mr. Rojas: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Where's your current employment now?

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Mr. Rojas: I'm retired. I retired from the marshal service in 2018. I was sitting...

Mayor Lago: So...

Mr. Rojas: I'll be honest with you, sitting comfortably up in my vacation home in North Carolina, having a glass of wine, looking at the mountain, when my friends started calling me and saying, hey, this opportunity is coming up. I think you can do a good job. And I prayed on it. I looked at it. And I said, you know what? I'm going to put my name in the hat, just like I did with the Marshal Service when a friend of mine called me and said, hey, put your name in the hat. And I was able to be appointed U.S. Marshal.

Mayor Lago: So, let's talk about that because I want to reiterate what the Vice Mayor said. Putting your name in the hat for consideration. I think that's the best thing that you can do for the City.

Mr. Rojas: I know, but the decision of how you...

Mayor Lago: I get it, I understand, but I'm just telling you...

Mr. Rojas: Is not mine.

Mayor Lago: The reason why when you're invited to come here and we have this type of discussion, it's again, it's the shock and awe treatment of we want to get an upper hand on everybody and not give anybody any opportunity to even have a discussion on items. It's we want to spring something on somebody. That's not the way that I would handle the employment of my manager. When you're talking about somebody who is going to be running over 1,000 employees, who's going to be dealing with a budget over \$200 million, who's going to be dealing with major issues across the board, then you're not qualified. Probably, you're super qualified for the job, but we, as the five people up here, have a responsibility to 51,000 residents in this community. That I'm not going to go out there -- I have a lot of people who I could bring here right now who are very qualified for the job. Maybe not as qualified as you. Again, let's just say you're the most qualified guy I've ever met for the position. But I'm all telling them, you need to go through a process because I'm not going to have anybody -- first, I won't get them through the Commission because I don't have any -- I don't have the votes. They would never entertain hiring -- hiring somebody that I bring no matter how qualified they are. And that's the first problem that we have, bringing somebody that one commissioner prefers over another is where, again, I think the system breaks down and it doesn't show the level of transparency and the level of open process. You bring an outside entity to handle the process, you put your, like you said, your name in the hat, and I think it's an opportunity to be selected. But again, it is what it is. We're moving forward.

Mr. Rojas: Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if...

Mayor Lago: Well, again...

Mr. Rojas: As a Commission...

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's also up to you.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Rojas: Sorry?

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's also up to you.

Mayor Lago: By the way, I'm the second one in this Commission, I think, maybe the third. I don't want to speak for a Commissioner -- I've never met you.

Commissioner Castro: That's what I said.

Mayor Lago: I've never heard of you. But again, I haven't looked at your résumé because I don't have my computer in front of me and I want to see you with my better eyes. So I, again, Commissioner Menendez wanted to say something, so moving forward.

Commissioner Menendez: So, it's great to have a Cavalier there.

Mr. Rojas: Thank you.

Commissioner Menendez: Last gentleman was a Columbus Explorer, so now we have a Cavalier. A question for the City Clerk, because lately, not this Commission meeting, I hear it all the time that it's always a 3-2 vote, 3-2 vote, 3-2 vote. What percentage more or less since the last election of 2023 have we voted 5-0, roughly?

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner, the last time I did this exercise was in January. And it was not counting the consent agenda, it was right under 90 percent.

Commissioner Menendez: 90 percent, we vote 5-0. I think there's a misperception in the community that even though we debate, we disagree, when it comes down to it, 90 percent of the time we vote 5-0. I want -- and the Clerk just made it clear. The other part is, I remember getting phone calls some years ago when a new manager was being sought. And I remember there was Cathy Swanson and there was Peter Iglesias. And if I'm -- obviously, I wasn't a Commissioner, but I don't believe they were a result of a national search. They were selected a different way. So, my understanding is...

Mayor Lago: That's not the case.

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Commissioner Menendez: No?

Mayor Lago: No, no, no, no, it's not the case. It was a process. It was a process that we went through. And by the way, and if -- I don't want to interrupt you so...

Commissioner Menendez: No, no, no, no, that was -- I mean, my point is, and in terms of -- I think we all agree that at the very least the gentleman has more than qualifications for the City's needs. And you know, it's interesting because the comparison, you know, I'm an attorney, the Vice Chair -- Vice Mayor is an attorney, and you know, attorneys -- if attorneys can serve as commissioners, then the U.S. Marshal for the Southern District, I think, can be a city manager. You know, one thing doesn't exclude a person from being able to do something additional and do it well. So, I think that argument to me is inconsistent. Again, I'm still listening, but I just wanted to make those comments early on.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to add a few more.

Mayor Lago: So, I'd like to answer -- just if I may, I'd like to respond to the Commissioner. When I say the majority of the votes, I'm talking about major votes. You know, simple resolutions and things like that. But when you talk about issues like, for example, annexation, when you talk about issues like November elections, you talk about salary increases, you talk about simple things that should be no-brainers like going through a process, it's usually 3-2. You know, it's usually 3-2 in regards to those major items that are kind of litmus test items here in the City. I apologize, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no need to apologize. The analogy of being an attorney to being a commissioner is totally different than being a city manager as far as the background and experience. And one of the things that I've taken away from other experts that I've worked with, and I've worked with a wide variety of experts in federal court, is I'm one of the few attorneys out there that understand financial statements, balance statements, and know how to litigate those matters. And that's why I was in the Court of International Trade as well, dealing with, you know, what is the gross margin on products and so forth. They would always select me in the case to argue the financial figures because we all have different backgrounds and experiences. But I'm going to read to you so that you understand the context of where we're coming from here. Quote from Commissioner -- County Commissioner Cabrera, that I was authorized to read into the record. Commissioner Cabrera says he's spoken to Director Cutié and he stated that all he agreed to was to have a conversation and that Commissioner Cabrera finds it very unprofessional to publicly disclose a private conversation regarding potential employment -- that means employment here -- while he's a person still employed by another employer. The reason I bring this up to you is that the process was broken at the last meeting with a particular Commissioner bringing a name out of a hat. This is not a normal process. I think that you would come in with greater acceptance from the community if you went through a normal process, whether it be a nationwide search or a local

search, but there's more than one name in the hat. Because any time you have one name in a hat, and we went through that back when our city manager was Ms. Swanson. It was one name in a hat to -- and Mayor, I think you know these facts better than I do because I was busy with kids and trials at the time -- one name and a hat to be moved up or brought in as a second chief of police. There wasn't a normal process done. They skipped some of the interview process. And skipping those processes automatically creates a shadow or distrust around the name. I'm not saying that you're a person that can be distrusted. You have an impeccable career and I don't want to taint it. And I'm suggesting to you, you don't want to have it tainted by an improper process as well. We have another City Commission meeting coming up in the beginning of April. I'd love to sit down with you. I'd love to have a great conversation, but I'd also like to see one more name in the hat so that you come in with a deliberative process, where you come out as being the best between the candidates, and you step in here with that integrity, and you can lead the employees, because the employees will have the utmost respect for you if you go through that type of process as opposed to an ad hoc process that's being done here today. So, that's my suggestions to you.

Mr. Rojas: I've never been opposed to a good fight and a good competition, so I leave it up to -- to you all.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to respond, if I may, something that the Vice Mayor said in particular, talking about one of our county commissioners. I too spoke to that County Commissioner and the County Commissioner expressed their surprise and frustration with how the name of the candidate came up. But that County Commissioner also spoke glowingly of that candidate. That County Commissioner told me that they were ready to write a letter of recommendation for that candidate if that candidate was ready to move forward. So, it's two sides to the entire story.

Mayor Lago: But I -- if I may, I want to add something.

Vice Mayor Anderson: What's the process?

Mayor Lago: I want to add something to that. While Mr. Cutié is incredibly competent and revered, let's also not lie to ourselves that the way that it was presented was flawed because I received a phone call from Mayor Cava in my office in front of staff where -- excuse me, sir -- where she was not very happy with the way that things played out. So -- and you can have that conversation with her and I put it on the record because she told me to say that. So, there's -- we're not -- we're not debating whether the gentleman was competent or not or whether he had done an extremely well job in public life. That's not the question. The question was whether the -- the way it was presented. And that's what I think we have an issue also here. But at the end of the day, like I told you, Commissioner Menendez says 90 percent of the time we vote 5-0. Yes, but when you talk about issues, for example, adding to that list, the firing of the city manager, the termination of the City Manager, on issues that are true litmus tests here in the City, we don't vote 5-0, we vote 3-2. And the best way for you to start, for you to start here in the City, is with the

entire support of the Commission by throwing your name into the ring and having a discussion with -- through a thorough process and being able to sit down with every single Commissioner and also meeting with other people. What if there's potentially somebody that's more qualified than yourself for this position? I want to take this opportunity not to just to name you but look at every other candidate that's possibly out there that's interested in this position. That's my opinion.

Commissioner Castro: I say we take advantage and we get to know you right now in the most transparent manner. This is recorded. Everybody's listening, everybody's hearing. So, I'll ask you some questions and please stop me, Raquel, if those are questions I'm not allowed to ask, okay? Number one, welcome to Coral Gables. But do you live here in Florida? Do you live in Coral Gables? Do you live (INAUDIBLE)?

Mr. Rojas: No, I -- excuse me, I could never afford to live in Coral Gables. It's true, to be honest with you. But I did go to Coral Gables High School. I grew up in the Shenandoah area. I went to school here, started my law enforcement career in South Miami Police Department, next door neighbors, and basically worked my way up, did 25 years for the Department of Law Enforcement, started as a narcotics agent, worked all the way up to Special Agent in Charge of the South, you know, Miami Region Operations Center, which basically encompasses Palm Beach to Key West, the largest FDLE office in the state. I was co-chair of the Homeless Security Task Force. I was also home chair of the Coast Guard Homeless Security Task Force Southeast -- co-chair of that committee. After I retired from FDLE, the State Attorney's Office, Kathy Rundle called and asked if I would be her Deputy Director of the Task Force, and I accepted that challenge. I did that until my appointment to the U.S. Marshal Service. So, that's my -- I went to the University of Alabama. I graduated from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. I was a police officer -- actually, a police director there for a while and then came back home.

Commissioner Castro: Do you live in North Carolina right now?

Mr. Rojas: No, no, no. I live in Miami. That's just a vacation...

Commissioner Castro: Okay. I thought...

Mr. Rojas: No, no, no.

Commissioner Castro: That was my concern.

Mr. Rojas: We live in Miami.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Am I allowed to ask any family questions? No, right?

Mr. Rojas: Go ahead.

Mayor Lago: May I just?

Mr. Rojas: What's that?

Mayor Lago: May I interject?

Commissioner Castro: I mean, if we're going to vote him in, let's -- if we are, I think the most information we can have of you, the better it is.

Mr. Rojas: Well, I'll tell you, I'm married. I have three kids, all three daughters. I have five grandkids. And my oldest daughter is a Miami-Dade detective. My middle daughter is a nurse practitioner at Miami Children's Hospital. My youngest daughter lives in North Carolina, a student. And my wife is also in law enforcement. So, our whole family is law enforcement. Basically our philosophy has always been faith, family, and service to the community. And that's what I did, that's what my kids did, that's what my kids do. You asked what I was doing now. When I'm not in North Carolina, I'm my grandkids' Uber driver. I drive them to Columbus, I drive them to Lourdes, I drive them to wherever they need to go. That's my job.

Commissioner Castro: Beautiful. And I don't know if anybody else has more questions if we will have to look at this as an interview process right here more transparently.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I -- the questions would be quite extensive and I think we'll be here for the next three hours if we continue on...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Anderson: On this course.

Commissioner Castro: I think it's an important decision so as long as it takes.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, I mean, we -- you know, becoming city manager is in no tall order, okay? I mean, it's a huge commitment. There is a whole list of items that are terms in your agreement with your contract. If for some reason you're voted in today as manager, you have all the leverage in regards to your pay, your salary, your terms, all that kind of stuff. What I'm going to be asking for, as we have a first and a second, is for the sake of the City, if you're interested in this job, let's go the professional route. I think asking you questions about you is asking -- I'm asking you to please take your -- because obviously, one of the Commissioners wants to keep pushing forward and pushing forward. This is not the right way to do things. It's not the -- we don't do things like this in the private sector. I don't walk into my office in the private sector and then have my business partner, you know, basically having just hired somebody. You know, we make sure we have a conversation, we take it through a process, we do a background check, we try to find the most qualified person for that position, especially a position which is, again, not a

remedial position or an entry-level position. It's a position that is the top position in an organization. You hire that through the process that is ironclad, that ensures that we have gone through and taken -- and dotted every I and crossed every T. So, I've said that about 10 times.

Mr. Rojas: I'm not sure -- you lost me on the contract part.

Mayor Lago: I'm asking -- I'm asking -- I'm just being very clear with you. I think that you should, in my opinion, is you should advise Commissioner Fernandez, is that let's go -- if you're serious about this job, my advice to you is to go through a process, not to just come up here and say, I want the job, I have the votes, and I'm moving forward without, again, having a real in-depth knowledge -- not saying you can't pick up that knowledge over a certain amount of time. You're probably a brilliant man who can probably pick it up faster than anybody else, but it takes time, you know, there's a lot of moving parts here, and I think they're the best thing to do...

Mr. Rojas: I don't argue with the moving parts. I don't argue with the fact that there's going to be a learning curve, and for me, probably a big learning curve when it comes to some of the issues, like union negotiations or some of the other things that are going on. But I'm sort -- sort of -- you keep repeating, if you really want the job, if you really want to be professional, and I really, I take -- I take exception to those two things. I do want the job, if not, I won't be standing here. And I am trying to be professional. But if the Commission wants to do something different, I'm fine by it. I'm here to volunteer my services. Don't want my services? No problem.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate you.

Mr. Rojas: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Rojas: I appreciate it. And I would love to sit down and talk to all of you honestly.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, no. I mean, it's not -- it's not to say that you're not qualified. It's just, what I'm saying is, you're in a - if you're going to be the person managing a thousand employees, in order for them to feel confident in you and the directions that you give them, they will be much more able to do so if you do the normal hiring process.

Mr. Rojas: Understood.

Commissioner Castro: Through the...

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's my point.

Mr. Rojas: Understood.

City Commission Meeting

February 27, 2024

Agenda Item F-10 - Resolution of the City Commission directing City staff to engage an executive search firm for search relating to City Manager position.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Manager. I think that a lot of the things the Mayor is saying are pretty accurate, but given the circumstances that we're in, I do not trust that he's not going to sabotage this opportunity. So, I am still seconding his motion given the past history of what's happened.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And so, we have -- we have five people on this and I -- I don't -- I know this City Manager is not going to sabotage the process. I know that I'm going to sit down and spend the respective time with you and bring you up to date on as much things as possible, okay?

Mr. Rojas: Yes, ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And make some respective -- respectful suggestions on how to get up to speed the fastest. But I think an informed decision by you, knowing more about our city would be helpful to you going forward. And being that you've gone through more of a process, your ability to lead will be enhanced if you go through that process, as opposed to a 3-2 vote because you didn't go through the process.

Mr. Rojas: Understood.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. I appreciate you. Thank you very much. Is there any other further comments on the record?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have a member of the public requesting to speak. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Please come forward.

Maria Cruz: Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. First, let me apologize. I am here as a member of this community who has serious concerns about the way things are going. And I felt offended by the -- some of the comments that were made. I -- I'm trying to hold myself because if we were -- if this was an ideal situation, like we had three Commissioners back, we had a search. Did any of the employees meet the person? No, as a matter of fact, the person was hired, lasted what, one day? And then had to let go -- be let go because something didn't come up in the interview. Now, I'm sorry, but what we're trying to do here is the same thing that happened with Mr. Cutié. You know what? Let's paint it so bad that the gentleman will say, you know what, I don't need this. Take me out of the discussion. No, this is the best city to work. Our residents, our taxpayers will embrace anyone that comes here to do a good job. What I heard -- remember, I listen carefully because I'm a retired educator. I heard somebody say to you, I do not know everything, but I'm

willing to have the experts guide me. You have an Assistant City Manager -- well, an Interim City Manager now, who is -- who was an Assistant City Manager., who is an expert that I'm sure would be very happy to be the resources for this gentleman if we were to make him the new City Manager. I believe that -- I'm sorry for those of you that are not happy with how this is being handled. There was no other way to handle it. Because you know what? As much as we like to say there were no threats, there were no bullying. I'm sorry, I got the text messages. I got the phone calls. Other people have text messages. Other people got text. You know what? I didn't send them. No, but my PAC did, or my friend did it. You know, enough is enough. This is what is called, let's move on, let's do it, and support this gentleman. And I'm sorry, if I hear anybody else say, well, you know, if you were to take it, you need to -- because you know what? That's how the conversation began before. If you take it, since I didn't select you, since my friends didn't choose you, you know we're going to make your life hard. Well, I want you to know, sir, that if you are selected, you will have the residents, the taxpayers of Coral Gables behind you because we want the City to go back to what it was before, the best.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

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

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion and a second on the floor. We need any further discussion? Are we ready to move forward?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's move forward.

Mayor Lago: Yes, go ahead.

City Attorney Suárez: Sorry, Mayor. Some clarification. This is -- Is this merely a motion to appoint without terms or an effective date?

Mayor Lago: Again, this is the way the business is being handled. This is what is requested by the Commission, and this is where we're going to move forward.

Commissioner Castro: Do you think we can have a five-minute break to discuss some things?

City Attorney Suárez: I can do whatever the Commission directs.

Mayor Lago: This is not -- this is -- this is -- to negotiate with somebody and bring somebody up to speed takes more than five minutes. This is not the way that things are done.

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Do we have the votes? Before I -- I mean, we should just take the vote and see if we have the votes. If we have the votes, then obviously we move forward. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: Let's get a vote.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Fernandez, can you please repeat your motion, sir?

Commissioner Fernandez: The motion was to appoint Amos Rojas, Jr. as Coral Gables City Manager.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you, sir. Will a member of the Commission be appointed to negotiate on behalf of the Commission?

Commissioner Fernandez: I actually have provided Mr. Rojas with the current salary structure. And as far as I'm concerned, he has agreed to continue on the same contract structure as the prior City Manager.

Mr. Rojas: That's correct.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Okay, alright.

City Attorney Suárez: What about an effective date?

Commissioner Fernandez: It's effective tomorrow.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, you're suggesting a one-vote resolution as opposed to a first and a second?

Mayor Lago: And no national search, just picking this gentleman and then that's (INAUDIBLE).

City Attorney Suárez: So, I have not seen the terms that may have been provided to him.

Commissioner Fernandez: Same ones that the Interim City Manager signed.

City Attorney Suárez: So, that resolution was specific to the Interim City Manager position because there's some nuances associated with that given that he was the Deputy City Manager and given that it was only for three months. So, you know, those -- those details would have to be worked out.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Alright, and just to clarify...

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner...

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE).

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner, just really quick. Typically, the way we do it is we do a resolution appointing the gentleman, and then a second one agreeing to the terms of employment.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, the first -- the first motion is to appoint him as City Manager effective tomorrow.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, and nothing on the agenda to notify the residents so they can provide public input or have an independent search committee that was...

Mayor Lago: Done, it's done.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just want to make...

Commissioner Fernandez: If there was a fair playing field where people weren't threatened, weren't being intimidated, we could follow the routine process. But what we've seen here over the last two weeks is that threats and intimidation are the course of action by an anonymous PAC and by individuals on this dais.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right here, right now, this gentleman got a threat from you and a threat from you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: He didn't get a threat from me. I just told him what my choice would be to be...

Mayor Lago: Can we stop? Stop, stop.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I mean, that's just...

Mayor Lago: Stop, stop.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's just insulting.

Mayor Lago: Stop, stop.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're insulting.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, excuse me. Sir, please, join us. With your background in law enforcement, I would like a clear answer, please. Do you feel threatened by myself or the Vice Mayor, anything we told you today?

Mr. Rojas: No, there's nothing that you have said...

Mayor Lago: I'm asking -- just asking a simple question.

Mr. Rojas: There's nothing that you have said that has caused any fear or threat. I just took exception to the -- to the issue of that I -- do I really want the job and the professional side of it. That's the only exception I have. But no, absolutely not.

Mayor Lago: My point about the professional side was coming into the position -- coming into the position with over a thousand employees and how the process was handled. That's the only way -- that's the only thing that I meant. So, you don't feel threatened?

Mr. Rojas: It's going to be different.

Mayor Lago: Let me explain to you, let me explain to you so you don't feel threatened. I just want to put it on the record because that is being used over and over and over again. It's even made publications and the threats and the whole thing. It's being used as an opportunity to push forward, okay? So, okay, are we...?

Mr. Rojas: You make me want to change my mind.

Mayor Lago: I'm just saying that you don't feel threatened. Okay, alright, so we have a motion - - we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Castro: Commissioner Fernandez, would you want to take five minutes to speak to the City Attorney to make sure that the terms that he had are going to be the same terms this City Manager is going to have?

Commissioner Menendez: Just a thought, last time with the Interim City Manager, Alberto, he was approved and then you all came back with agreement at the end of the meeting?

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: Can you -- can you try to do that, to see if you can do that?

City Attorney Suárez: Certainly, we'll do whatever the Commission directs. Certainly we can do that.

Mayor Lago: Alright, so there is no vote.

Mr. Rojas: Can I make a suggestion?

Commissioner Menendez: No, there is a vote.

Commissioner Fernandez: There's a vote.

Mr. Rojas: Can I make a suggestion? I'm sorry, maybe it's -- I'm out of place addressing the Commission but let me make a suggestion because I like compromise and I like consensus. How about I work as a City Manager under contract till after the election, because you have an election coming up in April, that's a year from now, and in the meantime or during that time, close to the election, before the election, you'll decide to do a national search, do whatever you want to do, and I'm on my way.

City Attorney Suárez: Mr. Mayor, can I just address...?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, yeah, go ahead.

City Attorney Suárez: So, we cannot do a contract because the City Manager position serves at the will and at the pleasure of the Commission. So, at any time, the City Commission can decide to terminate that appointment.

Mr. Rojas: Understood.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may interrupt, and I apologize for if I did. You've done an amazing job presenting yourself. I too apologize that it's sort of -- things have sort of mushroomed into a mushroom cloud. But my understanding is there's a motion second to appoint, and then the second part would be to instruct the City Attorney to sit down with the candidate or -- and come up with an agreement by the end of the meeting like we did with Alberto, if that's possible. But I think there are two steps, right? Appoint, and then the contract.

City Attorney Suárez: So, there doesn't have to be two steps. It has been done like that sometimes in the past. There doesn't have to be, but we can certainly do it in the two-step fashion. I do, you know, kind of suggest to the Commission that you do think about the effective date. You know, I don't know if Mr. Amos is ready to just jump in tomorrow as well, but just think about that and possibly a transition. Also, I think what he was suggesting was maybe we can describe it as an Interim City Manager, you know, position or longer term. That's something else that I think he

was trying to offer as his, you know -- as he described it, a compromise. But certainly we can do it in one step or two steps, but if we do it in the one step, we should have all the terms in there.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm comfortable with two steps. So, if the will of the Commission is to appoint, get it out of the way. That's the way I look at it.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Menendez?

Commissioner Menendez: Statement first. The City of Coral Gables is adrift in a cesspool of public corruption. And I'm here to help navigate our beloved city out of the muck and to safe harbor. So, I vote yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Vice Mayor Anderson?

Vice Mayor Anderson: In order to have the integrity of this individual be unquestioned, a normal process is necessary. And classifying a cesspool of corruption is not an accurate statement as to what's going on with our current employees. To do so disparages their integrity and starts off the tenure of any person that's voted in here at a very high incline dealing with individuals that have been now disparaged by this Commission. A normal process is necessary in order to have the trust of the employees. A normal process is necessary to have the trust of the residents. And I've asked for a normal process to be done repeatedly. The residents have asked for that. Public comment this morning, which sorry you were not here for, also asked for that. It's been consistent and uniform. So, based upon those reasons, my -- my vote is no.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Castro?

Commissioner Castro: I would normally ask for us to go through the normal process of hiring, especially with my background in psychological HR matters, but I have to override whatever I'm thinking due to the circumstances that we are traveling through or facing. And I am not going to jeopardize this opportunity, which I think he's an overqualified candidate. So, yes, my answer is yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Fernandez?

Commissioner Fernandez: Considering what we're dealing with in Coral Gables and what we saw over the last two weeks, it is unfortunate we couldn't follow a different process. But, you know, there's a God up there and sometimes he puts the right people in our paths. This is a man who has extensive experience in leadership and can navigate our city, as I said before, into the next centennial, ensuring that it is a clean city. So, it is my honor to cast the deciding vote, yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor Lago?

Mayor Lago: Again, the decision has been made. All I can tell you is congratulations. I wish you the best of luck. I look forward to working with you on behalf of the residents and the business community. My vote will be no based on the simple process that I had just met you not even an hour ago and I think that the residents deserve an opportunity and the business community deserve an opportunity to be able to meet you, to have a conversation, to see who you are and what you stand for. I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to working with you tomorrow.
(Vote: 3-2)

Mr. Rojas: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item F-1.

Commissioner Menendez: We have to -- do we need to make a motion on the contract?

City Attorney Suárez: So, we would -- I need time to -- to -- to meet with Mr. Rojas and sit down and...

Commissioner Menendez: (INAUDIBLE) to instruct you to.

City Attorney Suárez: Certainly, I mean, I think if there's a direction is there, I have no problem. I think the direction was given.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay. I'll make a motion to instruct the City Attorney to negotiate an agreement.

City Attorney Suárez: So, I don't negotiate.

Commissioner Menendez: I mean, to...

City Attorney Suárez: So, typically, the Mayor's the one who negotiates.

Commissioner Menendez: To work to establish a contract for our new...

City Attorney Suárez: With the...

Commissioner Menendez: City Manager.

City Attorney Suárez: The compensation that was set forth in the Interim City Manager's resolution.

Commissioner Menendez: Correct.

City Attorney Suárez: Okay. What about the effective date? Do you want me to discuss it with him and then come back with something?

Commissioner Menendez: I'm sure he has some thoughts, I would imagine.

Mr. Rojas: No, I'm ready to go right now. What time is it? I'm ready to go.

City Attorney Suárez: Alright.

Mr. Rojas: Tomorrow, next week, it's really whatever the -- I would suggest, depending on the pace cycle as it falls for the City, it's probably a lot easier to come in at the beginning of a cycle than it is to mess that up. So, I mean, I'll come in for free until the cycle comes in.

City Attorney Suárez: So, how about we discuss that one-on-one whenever we take a recess?

Unidentified Speaker: Come back with it.

City Attorney Suárez: Okay, and then the other issue that we -- you know, I can discuss later will be also the Interim City Manager and what he will do.

Mayor Lago: Yes, okay.