

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item F-12**  
**September 26, 2023**  
**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, Peter Iglesias**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Finance Director, Diana Gomez**

**Human Resources Director, Raquel Elejabarrieta**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Gordon Sokoloff**

**Maria Cruz**

**Debra Register**

**Saralane Conde**

**Sue Kawalerski**

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Agenda Item F-12 [3:52 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing that City staff amend the proposed Annual Budget of estimated revenues and expenditures for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2023 and ending September 30, 2024 prior to the second reading of the ordinance adopting said budget in order to reduce the proposed

salaries, local expense accounts and car allowances of the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-12.

City Attorney Suárez: F-12 is a resolution of the City Commission directing that City staff amend the proposed Annual Budget of estimated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2023 and ending September 30, 2024 prior to the second reading of the ordinance adopting said budget in order to reduce the proposed salaries, local expense accounts, and car allowances of the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: As the salary increase has been a topic of much consternation about the methodology in which it was done. I put this proposed resolution together to be able to provide an opportunity for the Commissioners to remove from the budget and to be able to take a course that is in the Sunshine, whether it be a discussion item, a Sunshine meeting, you know, an ordinance with a first and second reading or if you want to put it on the ballot with regard to the wage increases. So, I put together for you what I had learned the different proposals were and an analysis of them because sometimes when you do an analysis of something, you get to be able to see what the true impact was. And historically, you know, we had this issue raised in October of 2022, when raises and executive benefits were discussed in a then Gables Insider. These charts that you see on here give you the various breakdowns and, Clerk, Mr. Urquia, you can go ahead and put up the charts that I have given you for the public to be able to see what's going on and so Commissioner Castro can see the documents that have been handed out. Do you have those documents?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so let's go ahead and start with the first so we give Commissioner Castro an opportunity to follow us. And Commissioner, I hope you're feeling better. And I appreciate you...

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Appreciate you not sharing your germs with me today, very much so. The first page -- let's go ahead and start with that. All right, maybe it's the last page. We have the Gables Insider article, so that we're all kind of following along. Sorry to make you guys jump around. There was a separate -- there's one folder for this item, but there's two separate

documents. Do you have that available? One day we'll have our own screens here and we can control this a little better. I can dream, a girl can dream, right?

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: (INAUDIBLE) IT Department.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, we do, we do. We just need modern technology here. I don't think we're prohibited from having modern technology.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, not yet.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so this was the article at the time, and you know, reaction from residents. There was a chart. This is just an excerpt of the article itself and it showed a variety of percentages, of increases, all of which were below the current proposal that was proposed for the Commissioners. Page 3 and 4 give a breakdown of what those increases in the current budgets are. It represents 101.14 percent. Okay, staff is slow.

City Attorney Suárez: So, I think the Vice Mayor has moved on to a different page in that document.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Option three, current proposed in budget, which is actually uploaded as...

Mayor Lago: You have to move to the next slide.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Next slide, please.

Commissioner Fernandez: (INAUDIBLE) presentation.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was able to control this in a courtroom in El Paso in 2011 so I'm a little spoiled.

Mayor Lago: Here we go. Now we're back.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, there's the one we have at the top. You can leave it at that level. It shows, you know, in percentage, translating out the dollars for this increase; 101.14, 92.91, for the Vice Mayor, percent, and 71 percent for the Mayor increase in budget for salaries for the Commissioners. It's a substantial increase, which is why I felt it needed to be brought out and discussed so the residents understand what these increases are. The other two proposals that were, you know, at least brought to me as an option was a 59 percent roughly increase for Commissioners, 53 for the Vice Mayor, 36 for the Mayor, and a third in here, 37 percent, 33 percent, and 21 percent for the Mayor. The breakdown is in here so that the public can also

evaluate it. What I'd like to do is bifurcate this motion in two parts to give you all the opportunity to meaningfully decide which route you want to take. Do you want to vote for a percent that's in this resolution? Do you want to take another course on where you think salaries should be? Whether it be, let's have some public discussion or a Sunshine meeting? Or put it out in an ordinance for public comment? Or put it on the ballot? Okay, it's not my item in a way of the decision because it wasn't my item that I put in the budget itself. So, I'm going to make the motion to bifurcate just the first section to pull the salary increase out of the budget and then we can do a second motion on the amount of increase itself.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, there's a motion.

City Attorney Suárez: So, Vice Mayor, just to clarify your motion is to basically remove the salary increases from the budget. Is that accurate?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct.

City Attorney Suárez: Except for CPI? Except for the CPI increase that's automatic every year?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, automatic on the CPI, yes. We're kind of stuck with that. Otherwise, we hurt other employees, correct, Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, the CPI increase is fine.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Alright.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question. I have a question. City Manager, at any point, did Vice Mayor Rhonda accept any increase when she was approached by it?

City Manager Iglesias: I think the Vice Mayor came with a small increase and that's what all my discussions with the Vice Mayor were.

Commissioner Castro: And can you disclose what the increase she was in accordance with was?

City Manager Iglesias: I don't have that. I don't recall the information right now, but it was a slight increase in the salaries.

Commissioner Castro: What does slight mean?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Commissioner, if you'd like me to answer, I can answer you directly.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I did not put any of the increases in. Okay, it was more of a discussion about whether what you guys would want. So, these were the numbers that were given to me for understanding the impact on the budget and I did not choose to include it in this budget, nor would have I ever, ever chosen to put it in, in a way into the budget to where it was not transparent and disclosed to the public. It wasn't in a draft budget. This wasn't discussed during the draft budget stages for the public to hear. So, I've brought this item in as a way to cure this issue that has become a rather sore point in our city with residents and (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Castro: But my question -- but my question is...

City Manager Iglesias: Let me -- let me -- yes.

Commissioner Castro: What were you in support of? What increase were you in support of?

City Manager Iglesias: Let me clarify the answer. I discussed this with the Vice Mayor, as I discussed with all of you. And there was a discussion about a slight increase, which I felt was appropriate, because -- and that was it. But I don't recall the Vice Mayor coming to me and proposing a salary increase. Let me just clarify that. I think we had a -- I believe that we had a discussion on this item, which I initiated.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, but you're still not answering my question. What is the number that she had support for?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I didn't provide a number I was in support for. So, therefore, you can't provide something you weren't provided. You have a CPI increase, that's normal down the line. It impacts the rest of the employees as well if we decline the CPI increase.

Commissioner Fernandez: Alright, just to...

Commissioner Castro: Okay, I -- and my second question here is, I think the Mayor said that this was never brought to him, but then you just said right now that this was brought up to everyone. Is that correct?

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm sorry. (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Menendez: I think the question was, were all the members of the Commission briefed by you?

City Manager Iglesias: There was a discussion on salaries. The discussion with the Mayor was very brief. He said he was not in favor of any salary increase.

Mayor Lago: And I can -- let me answer just...

Commissioner Castro: So, the Mayor was informed because you're going in TV saying that you had no idea, that this was a surprise, and I'm sorry but let's not throw the City Manager under the bus, okay?

Mayor Lago: So, let me...

Commissioner Castro: He did advise you.

Mayor Lago: So, let me answer, okay. The City Manager contacted me one day at the office and we were having a conversation about a litany of different things in the City. He said, I need to go over this with you in regards to the budget. I said very quickly, I'm not in favor of any raise. I asked him very clearly, is there Commission support for this raise? Yes. I moved on.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, so you did know.

Mayor Lago: I...

Commissioner Castro: So, you did know. So, this wasn't a surprise.

Mayor Lago: Hold on, hold on. I did not know that I was -- that we were going to be given a 101 percent increase in salaries. But I was under the impression it was going to be a reasonable, a reasonable salary increase, which I still was against. I was not in favor of the Vice Mayor receiving almost 93 percent increase, the Mayor receiving 71 percent increase, and the Commissioners receiving almost 102 percent increase in their salaries. That's what I was not aware of. I said that I was not in favor of any salary increase outside of CPI and that's the conversation I had with the Manager. I said, you don't need to speak to me any further about this issue.

City Manager Iglesias: Actually, Mayor, you said you weren't in favor of any increase.

Mayor Lago: Of any increase, excuse me. I said, you don't need to speak to me.

Commissioner Castro: So, you didn't...

Mayor Lago: Let me just finish, Commissioner. I promise that I won't say another word about it, okay, about the issue of how I found out. I said I don't need to know anything else in regards to the numbers because I'm not in support of any raise in my salary. That's it. So, we moved on

from there and then the numbers have changed from 60 percent to 70 percent and now I find out it's 101 percent. Again, we're moving on.

Commissioner Castro: How is it that the numbers are changed like this? How is it that the numbers are changing like this?

Mayor Lago: Because my understanding is that there was three proposals that were provided. I'm here, I'm seeing them right now. There was three proposals that were provided, and that there were three proposals that were discussed. I didn't provide these proposals. I don't know why -- why are you interrogating me? I haven't said anything. This is not my idea. I didn't bring this up. I didn't ask for a raise. I don't understand why I'm being interrogated on the record here as if this is like my idea. So, I'm more than willing to have a conversation about it, but this was not my idea. I wholeheartedly from the beginning stated to the Manager, I'm not interested. Move on. I also stated on the record with the Manager that I think that this is something that should be handled on the Commission floor. It shouldn't be handled, tucked away in the budget, which is, I think it's like something like 250, 300 pages. I would have done something a little bit differently. I would have put it on the agenda to have a conversation about compensation. I would have done an analysis of what other municipalities were paying, and I would have looked at it. For example, I had a conversation yesterday with the mayor of Doral. They just rolled back -- in the Commission meeting a few days ago, they just rolled back the pension benefits that were provided by the previous administration, taking those pension benefits away. I think that's a very positive thing to do. I think it was a little, in my opinion, a little heavy-handed. I think this is heavy-handed of 102 percent rate. I think it's much. I think it could have been handled differently. But again, it wasn't my choice. This is the route that was taken. And now we're addressing it. We're having a conversation on it. But please don't make this...

Commissioner Castro: You know, I'm sorry...

Mayor Lago: But please don't make this...

Commissioner Castro: I'm sorry that you...

Mayor Lago: But please, Commissioner...

Commissioner Castro: I'm sorry that you feel that I'm interrogating you.

Mayor Lago: But Commissioner, don't...

Commissioner Castro: I'm sorry that you feel that I'm interrogating you. The thing is here that the way that you presented this last time was very suspicious. And looking like you didn't know anything. And like if there was lack of transparency, or I think, what did you say, corruption



during a TV show? I think that to me is unacceptable. Let's not put up a show, but that's it. We could finish this conversation.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, it's very simple, very simple. I asked the question on the floor here in the Commission, and I asked who brought this forward? Nobody on the Commission, except for the Vice Mayor, spoke up. Everybody stayed quiet. I asked staff, staff felt, you know, obviously it was a very uncomfortable position for staff. They didn't want to throw anybody under the bus. So, they were respectful, and they said, you need three votes to bring this item, or three Commissioners who were in favor to bring this item, put it into the budget. And that's the way it was moved forward. Obviously, you were in favor of it, Commissioner Fernandez, and Commissioner Menendez are in favor of it. And that's perfectly fine. That's within your right to support this if that's what you like. Again, I'm having a respectful conversation. I think that the raises are egregious. I think that they're over the top and they're just too much. And I'm entitled to disagree and have my opinion, just like Commissioner Fernandez and Commissioner Menendez and yourself can have an opinion and make whatever statement that you like to make. So that's it.

Commissioner Fernandez: You're absolutely right. We have -- we can disagree on this issue. I am in support of the changes in compensation, and I will explain why. The last major change in compensation for the Commission was in the 1980s, according to Mayor Dorothy Thompson. I had a resident approach me and say, have you realized that the compensation that you are asking for is really below a 1 percent year over year from that moment in time? The Commission should really be considering a larger increase. And actually, Vice Mayor, you said this is a dark point for the City of Coral Gables. I received two emails in reference to this issue against this. I received numerous phone calls from residents saying we should actually consider making the Commission a full-time position so that Commissioners can devote the time. And I'll tell you that my response to all of them is, all five of us up here devote full-time hours to this job. We are all dedicated to making sure that Coral Gables is functioning at 100 percent. And to be honest, I think everybody up here has elevated the role of Commissioner, Vice Mayor, and Mayor in the City of Coral Gables over the last two years, over the last few months. And we're really setting a high bar for anybody who's going to run for one of these seats in the future because the expectations are going to be a lot higher. We put in probably 30 hours a week here at City Hall. Then we go out in the community. We're out at resident events. We're out visiting people. We're at Sunshine meetings. We're going around, driving around, seeing an issue, calling the proper department to make sure that it's addressed, answering resident emails, answering phone calls. I don't really have to tell that to you all because you all do it too.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sure.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, based on the response that I've gotten from the community, I don't think that we're taking a step in the wrong direction. I think we're taking a step in the right



direction and setting up the City to have residents sitting up here who are committed to this city as much as all five of us are. And that's why I'm in favor of it.

Mayor Lago: May I respond to you? If I may. It's public record. The Clerk has all the emails. For every person that I've received an email from that is in favor of this raise, I've received 10 or 15 or 20 that are against it. Just today, alone. And you're all copied on the emails, so it's not like they're only copying me. You're all copied on it. It's a point of contention for people in the City. They're not happy about it. So, I think the way to cure the issue is the way that the Vice Mayor is proposing, is to have a candid conversation and to negotiate those proposed increases to salaries on the budget, here in front of everyone in a transparent way.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to add -- because I just got in a -- I'm sorry to interrupt.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead.

Vice Mayor Anderson: A tweet from one of our residents, Jessica Keller. And I'll just read it in the record because it was only sent to me and @CityofCoralGables. "I'd like to speak, but I have a work commitment. I want to note that I oppose Commission compensation increases without adequate public input. Adequate input would have included presentations during budget workshops at a minimum. Defer this for next fiscal year." So, I think you're missing my point. My point is the process was not done right. It wasn't in the draft budget. It wasn't done by ordinance. There was no discussion item on it. I mean, we have lots and lots of discussion items. We have lots and lots of Sunshine meetings. But instead, you know, but for the fact that I asked some questions in order to be bringing it out in the public eye so the public doesn't come back later on with an article saying that we're trying to hide things under the rug. And this, these particular pay increases were in the draft budget. This is not what I want to do. I want it in daylight. I want it to be transparent. I wasn't going to become part of the façade here where you hide increases in your salary so the public can't see it. That you tuck it under the rug, that you put it in Section 9, and it's not laid out -- Section 9 of the ordinance -- it's not laid out for the people to see. Do it in the same process that we do everything else. We can have a Sunshine meeting. We can have a discussion item and we can hear the public input. I'm getting the public input. I've gotten lots and lots of emails of people really upset with -- about this. I've gotten a lot of people approaching during the gala event saying, oh my God, this was not the way to do this. You need to do it in a Sunshine. That's why my first part of my motion is on the bifurcated process, take this out of the budget and do it the right way.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: I spoke to a lot of residents who've reached out to me. The one comment that did catch my attention, which I really didn't think about, but it made sense, who -- well, these residents were supportive. They said that with these increases, it gives the opportunity for a lot of people to in the future run for office because I guess what they're saying, you know,

people other than the affluent can run for office and do this full-time like we are doing and be able to earn a living and serve the community, the balance. And a lot of people said that they were sort of financially prohibited from running in the past because of the compensation not being adjusted for over 20 years. Now here is an interesting question and I don't quite know the answer, but I'm going to ask our Finance Director. Not only this budget, but in past budgets that you've worked on, have things been added after the draft comes out or after the workshop in the past? Now and in the past?

Finance Director Gomez: Yes, there is always -- there are always changes from the budget estimate to the first hearing and even sometimes to the second hearing. There are always changes that are necessary. During the summer months, additional revenues are identified, additional expenditures are identified during the summer months, and they get added to the first hearing budget and then there may be changes between the first budget hearing and the second budget hearing.

Commissioner Menendez: And it's -- so that's standard procedure?

Finance Director Gomez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: And when you do publish it's made available to the public and we have obviously a budget work -- or budget meetings held publicly, right?

Finance Director Gomez: So, the ordinance that is published with the first budget hearing does include the -- all the changes, not detailed detail, but summary changes for each item that has changed in the budget from the budget workshop, from the budget estimate document. And so, I mean, I have it in my hands. It's a 15-page document that lists all the changes and discusses all the changes. There are -- so there are changes that happen...

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Finance Director Gomez: During the summer months, yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Are there additional changes that have occurred this budget, additional changes that have occurred in past budgets, and since you've been doing this kind of job...

Finance Director Gomez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: This kind of work in your career, that's standard practice?

Finance Director Gomez: There are always changes -- well, yes, especially in this city because we have to publish a July 1 budget estimate. It is just that, an estimate, and there are many changes both on the revenue side and the expenditure side that happen during the summer months before

we get to the September hearings where we have the first hearing of the budget -- the first budget ordinance -- the first budget hearing. And again, those details of all those changes are included in the agenda packet.

Commissioner Menendez: So, you're comfortable, I guess, in terms of the way the City does things, other cities do things, when there are changes, you're comfortable enough that the community, the public's going to know those changes were made or those changes were added to the budget because we have a protocol, a procedure in place?

Finance Director Gomez: So, we are properly documenting the changes from the budget estimate to the first hearing to the second hearing. We provide the supporting documentation in the ordinance that is required. It is the public hearings -- the budget hearings are public hearings. Anybody can comment.

Commissioner Menendez: I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, can I ask you a quick question? Just -- because I know you're trying to get our Finance Director to say that this was done appropriately. There's nothing wrong with the way that it was handled in regards to the protocol, but the optics of it, in my opinion, were done in a way that I think could have been handled a lot better. Were there any rules that were broken? No, our staff is exceptional. I'm talking about premier finance director in South Florida, premier.

Commissioner Menendez: I agree.

Mayor Lago: She knows that; she knows what she's doing.

Commissioner Menendez: That's why I asked her the question.

Mayor Lago: But when you ask her the question, I mean, you notice that she squirmed when you asked her the question. So, my question to you is a very simple one. It's like me asking her right now, do you think that the optics would have been better if you would have handled it --? You don't have to answer me. I'm not asking you. Do you think that the optics would have been better if you would have done this in the Commission as an agenda item? And let me tell you why. It's very simple. Because we're the elected officials. We're the elected officials. We are the ones that legislate and represent the community and have office hours and meet with the residents and have to face the residents every two or four years. I would be hard-pressed to find a dozen or two dozen residents in this community who, with a fine-tooth comb, analyze our budget versus last year. Because everybody here is extremely busy, has faith that we have good leadership, and you know, they probably maybe look at something very quickly, hey, was this project funded? Was Burger Bob's funded? Like I had a nice lady who wrote me telling me that I had not funded Burger Bob's, and I had to explain to her and copy Fred Couceyro right now in an email and say, Fred, will you explain how we got Burger Bob's funded. I took \$250,000 from Parks, then we got some

additional money that came in. Can you give her a little bit of peace of mind that that project is funded? We expedited the construction. People are not aware of certain things. What I think we have to concentrate on is a very, very simple thing, and that is that it was not handled in the most transparent way. Commissioner Fernandez is here popping up on one of items an affidavit for me to sign. I want you to sign this affidavit. Again, an opportunity for a lot more, you know, a got you moment, theatrics, trying to get me to sign a document in front of everybody. I get it. I understand what's trying to be achieved. But please, like, don't put staff through that. Staff, she's going to give you the answer. She's going to give you the most respectful answer, saying that it's done the right way. But the issue is -- and you got all the emails that we got from the residents. It's public record. You know people wrote that they were not happy in the way that it was handled. This could have been handled very easily through a discussion on the Commission floor and it would have -- some people would agree with the salary increase, some people wouldn't have, and it would have just gone away. But in my belief, it was pushed into a budget with a 102 percent increase, which is a little bit aggressive, in my opinion. And maybe we could have accepted a 20 percent, a 15 percent, but I think 102 percent -- even you have to agree that, in one bite, 102 percent is a little bit significant. Maybe how about over a four-year period, you raise it incrementally, 10 percent a year to get to a decent number. I just think that 102 was too much. And that's how you got a little bit of a pushback from residents.

Commissioner Menendez: Now I want to clarify something.

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Menendez: I asked the Finance -- one moment, Commissioner Castro, please. I asked the Finance Director objective questions based on fact, based on standard procedures, based on the history of what the City has done. I didn't ask her a subjective question like you did.

Mayor Lago: What was the subjective...?

Commissioner Menendez: About optics? Her job is to finance the budget. I asked her factual questions. Have we added items after the budget workshop, black or white? It's factual. What's the standard practice? Factual. What's your history of this? Have you done this? Have you seen this before? Factual. I didn't ask her her opinion of this or that. That's subjective. She works in numbers. I ask questions based on numbers, based on history, based on facts. So please do not twist my words.

Mayor Lago: Let me answer you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Let me answer you, just one second. What you were trying to do was justify putting it in the budget the way that you put it. And you know, you know very well, very well that the

best way to handle it was the way it's handled right now on the Commission floor. It's to discuss it here and have input, input. So, it's not a big deal. You can go back and forth, whatever you like, at the end of the day. And I respect your comments wholeheartedly, but you're trying to find justification for putting it in the budget, and at the end of the day, you should have put it in the Commission floor for discussion. That is it. It's pretty simple.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I am going to -- Mayor, if I may.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just follow up with a few things. This breakdown with the prior salary, the current salary, with the CPI, and the proposed raises was not available for the public to view. So, it wasn't transparent. This is an opportunity for you to resolve a problem. That's what it is. You can take it or leave it. There is a motion. I don't know if we have a second.

Mayor Lago: I'll second it for discussion.

Commissioner Fernandez: Wednesday of last week, I put out a video to residents in addition to a full explanation of what the compensation changes were. I received four emails -- I just checked -- against it in total. It went out to 28,000 residents. So, you're portraying it here as if there's a clamoring in the community not to do this. It's not what I'm seeing in the community. And again, I've been getting phone calls from residents. They want to change to a full-time Commission so that there's no issues outside of the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That's not the issue here. The issue is doing it in a transparent fashion. And you're focusing on this needs to be a full-time position and we deserve more pay. I'm not discussing that right now. This is a bifurcated motion. Take it out of Section 9. Let's do it in the Sunshine. Let's allow the public participation. Now, I can't show you my emails. And I can't tell you about all the conversations because I can't do it but in the Sunshine. And what I'm talking about is let's have a Sunshine meeting on it if you want to do it, or we can put it as a discussion item, or you can draft an ordinance, like we do on everything else, okay?

Commissioner Fernandez: And this is the second reading that we've had -- that we have today. This is actually the third time we'll be discussing compensation.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because we discussed it at the last budget meeting. It's being discussed today, and it's on the agenda at the 5 p.m. budget hearing as well.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And again, I will repeat because it apparently is not clear enough for you. These numbers were not provided to the public. This breakdown was not provided to the public.

On the floor, there was a calculation of the amount of increase and the only number that was calculated was the raise to the Mayor, which was 70 some odd percent. The other alternatives that apparently were discussed between you all with the calculation of the percentage increase -- and these are my charts that I ran in order to understand the level of increase that was given -- that also wasn't provided to the public. So, every single one of those responses you got were handicapped by the same lack of information. If we're going to be a commission known for doing things in the public and transparent, we should set the example here now, especially when you're talking about your own compensation. I've gotten emails in early on, do not give raises to yourselves. We can't give them to ourselves. You know, I believe in having a conversation on everything, because sometimes along the way, people understand, oh wow, this is how many hours you put into this job. This is how much it's taken out of your regular job and decreased your ability to work. All those factors go into it. But the first step, the first step you have to take to be able to get to that point is to take this out of the budget and do it the right way. That's the motion that's on the floor. Clerk, do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: We do. First speaker is Gordon Sokoloff.

Gordon Sokoloff: Hi, good afternoon. It is a sticky topic indeed. I would first like to address City Manager for some short answers to my short questions. One, who puts the budget together? Who assembles it? Who types it? Who collates it?

Mayor Lago: Doctor, if I may, I apologize for interrupting you.

Mr. Sokoloff: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Our City Attorney would like to say something.

Mr. Sokoloff: Okay.

City Attorney Suárez: Yeah, I just want to clarify, this is an opportunity for public comment. It's not necessarily -- it's not for questions to any member of the Commission or the Manager.

Mr. Sokoloff: Okay. Can you --? All right. I assume that it's the City staff that puts it together. It's not the City Commission. Accordingly, the process itself, which is my understanding, is that the staff members meet with each of the Commissioners and the Mayor and the Vice Mayor independently and individually. None of the Commissioners approached you and said, we want a raise and we want this amount of money. They may have inquired about a raise. You know why? Because one hasn't been given since originally, I think, in the 1980s. And then it's my understanding that there was a small raise given at the turn of the century, right around 2000, 23 years ago. So, at the last Commission meeting, I was approached by the Mayor outside the chambers, and he asked me, he kind of approached me and he asked me very pointedly, Doc, do you think I'm corrupt? And I said no.



Mayor Lago: Can I -- can you tell -- can you tell them -- can you tell them why?

Mr. Sokoloff: Well...

Mayor Lago: Because after what was sent out by the CGNA attacked me personally and made some outlandish comments.

Mr. Sokoloff: Yeah, I'd like to finish.

Mayor Lago: That gets sent out to tens of thousands of people. And when you say that about somebody, it is just distasteful.

Mr. Sokoloff: Well, I would like to finish because that's out of context. You asked me that and then you and I had a string of conversations of emails which are public record.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Mr. Sokoloff: So, I wanted to read a little segment of that because during the conversation that we had with our emails, you said, and I quote, "You cannot turn a blind eye that the individuals you supported on the Commission just raised their salary by 67 percent. That is true corruption. The raise was proposed by Commissioners Menendez, Fernandez, and Castro. Remember the City Manager works at the will of the Commission. In this case, the three mentioned Commissioners approved this raise and required the Manager to place the item within the budget. Hiding it in the budget, which is a massive document, is a blatant attempt to mislead the community." I submit to you, they didn't hide it in the budget. The staff did. They put the budget together. It wasn't hidden, it was discussed. This is the second reading. And it was discussed at the last Commission meeting. It's my understanding that when the staff approached these microphones to discuss it, Vice Mayor, you actually hurried the agenda along and they didn't have the opportunity at that time to speak to or about the raises. They were supposed to be, but they were skipped over at the last meeting. First, let me say that anyone at all asking for a raise is not corruption. It isn't. The auto workers, the actors, a dental assistant in my dental office, anyone asking for a raise is entitled to that. My understanding was that you guys were getting about \$38,000 in your salary. So, some of these people that are writing on these blogs who said how greedy you are, you wouldn't have accepted these jobs or gone after them for 38 grand. Oh, man, the money that you're going to make. That's nonsense. The staff, from what I understand, you provided the numbers. The staff did a market analysis, and they came out with numbers that approached, what was it, an administrative assistant. That was the kind of salary that you were after to submitting for these Commissioners, the Vice Mayor, and the Mayor. So, it was not some sort of conniving rip-off by any of the Commissioners. Like many of the things in this city, things get left behind. My best example is the old police station. That went into ruin, it was ignored, and you abandoned that building and you had to build a whole new one. Also, I was -- as you know, I've served on boards



for over 10 years. I approached this Commission, or many of you, I think you're all aware of it, as a board member suggesting that the board members who often -- we get golf, we get tennis, we get Venetian Pool. Well, I'm an old guy, I have bad shoulders, bad knees, I don't play golf, I don't play tennis, and I have my own swimming pool. So, I said, how about a parking pass as an alternative? Now, that's not corruption, neither is asking for a raise. In fact, it's not corruption, it's about time. It's about time that you guys are provided a raise for the work that you do. 67 percent -- you have to remember, 67 percent, which is the number that you gave me, Mayor, at that time, now it's somehow up to 101 percent, but 67 percent, you have to consider the base, 67 percent of what, \$38,000? That's \$25,000. So, then your pay goes up to what, \$63,460. That's what an administrative assistant makes, more or less. That's still nothing exorbitant. The City has grown enormously since 1980. You have a whole new building next to you. You have about double the amount of employees, at least since 1980. There's so much more construction, so many more moving parts that requires a commission, maybe a larger commission. You're only five people. You're not 12, 15. You're only five. Our city can afford these modicum raises. The salary helps incentivize prospective citizens to consider running for office. I'd much rather have people that are coming and making money and looking forward to coming to work each day and serving the residents because they're making a manageable salary. In fact, I was looking up online, a living wage is the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support his or herself and the family. Do you know that the living wage in Miami-Dade County, if you have one child, is \$37 an hour? If you have two children, the living wage is \$47.03. So, you guys, if you break down an increase in the salary to what you're asking for, you're not making a living wage. You're still making about 30 bucks an hour. The jobs are hardly part-time, they're absolutely full-time jobs. I know this because I've been in and out of this building over my lifetime. Mayor, let me just ask -- mention one or two more things. If the City had raised salaries according to the cost of living or inflation since the 1980s based on your salaries of \$36,500, based on inflation of 3.5 percent, your salaries would be \$136,830. Mayor, you asked me last time if I thought you were corrupt, and I said no. Yet, because the staff fulfilled a request of one Commissioner inquiring, simply inquiring about a raise, something that is long overdue for these people, you have accused them of corruption and that's patently wrong. In fact, the CGNA might even call that dirty. That's not the right thing to do. That's not collegial. Here's what I wrote in my email, and then I'll end with this. This was my last public comment. It's in the email I wrote to you. I said, "I don't know if you or anyone else on the dais is corrupt, but it is the appearance of corruption that matters. To this end, it should be of concern to you and frankly anyone who serves in public office. Suffice it to say that I'm disappointed with the lack of collegiality on the City Commission and I truly wish that the relationships in the dais were less combative and more collaborative. I long for the day when all members of the City Commission have behaved truly pro-resident, which is part of the mission statement of the CGNA, and display consideration and complete transparency towards we, the residents, the true stakeholders of Coral Gables." Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Doctor. I'm going to ask the Finance Director -- but I appreciate your comments -- to step up, please, if she can. Just also a little bit of clarity in regards to administrative

assistants. I'm not aware of, maybe I'm wrong, Mr. Manager, do administrative assistants get car allowances and other expense accounts?

City Manager Iglesias: No, they don't.

Mayor Lago: They don't.

Mayor Lago: So, Doctor, administrative assistants here don't get car allowances, and you know, \$800 a month expense accounts here in the City. So, you can't compare it to an administrative assistant because it's not really apples and apples. And also in regards to 67 percent and 70 percent, the reason why it jumped up to 100 percent is because you added the car allowance and you added the expense account, which wasn't being added before. Madam...

Commissioner Menendez: I have a quick question. I'm sorry, Mayor. I have a quick question for the Finance Director.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And I also have a follow-up.

Mayor Lago: But I haven't finished, so if I may.

Commissioner Menendez: Oh, okay.

Mayor Lago: If I may. That's why I was calling the Finance Director. Quick question. You've worked at municipalities before, correct?

Finance Director Gomez: I have worked at another -- yes, I have.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, I remember. City of Miami.

Finance Director Gomez: City of Miami.

Mayor Lago: Were raises usually handled like this or were they handled where they were discussed in conversation? And I do not have an answer for that. I do not know. Were they handled on the Commission floor to have a conversation transparently?

Finance Director Gomez: So, honestly, I can't remember how they did it. Budget was not under my purview. I was only the Finance Director. They had a separate Budget Department. I didn't work on those things so I can't remember to be honest.

Mayor Lago: My point is very simple, and I don't want to belabor the point anymore. This could have been handled completely differently and it wasn't. It was in a massive document, like I mentioned to the doctor, where you have over 51,000 residents who are not going to read our

budget. They're not going to. They have full faith and confidence in the City to do the job. When you tell me that you want a salary increase after you've been on the job for five months, you knew what the salary was. You knew coming into the City what this job paid. So, you shouldn't be any surprised, especially members of this Commission who know the extent of the efforts that being an elected official is. Commissioner Fernandez, for 10 years, had a front row in my house understanding how the difficulty of dealing with being an elected official and how much time it took and how much you had to devote to this. This is not about a salary. This is about a privilege to serve. And that's the bottom line. You know, you can say anything you want about the salary in itself. I think it's exorbitant and it's egregious. It should have been on the Commission floor as a line item to discuss as a discussion item, as a resolution. We could have had a transparent conversation over it. My colleagues talk about residents first, you know, transparency and all kinds of things. And I agree, residents first, transparency. That's why we do Open Door Fridays. We've been doing it for 10 years. We've been doing everything we can to be upfront with residents and listen to them. But we all know, no matter how you try to spin it, that this was clearly not as transparent as it could have been because you have a lot more people that read this agenda than actually read a budget. We know that. We all know that, Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I have a quick question, too. The proposed salary, that's within the range of a senior administrative assistant. It's in that pay range, right?

Finance Director Gomez: The salary number, yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Who in the City gets car allowances? Directors, city managers, city attorney, assistant directors, I don't know, who?

Finance Director Gomez: So, City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk, directors, assistant directors, and a couple of other -- a couple of other -- I'm not sure exactly, but whoever -- the executive -- the executive class get car allowances.

Commissioner Menendez: And those obviously allowances because if you have to go on site, if you have to go to an event...

Finance Director Gomez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: If you have something, you're using your car.

Finance Director Gomez: Yes. That is the intent.

Commissioner Menendez: And -- okay, no, no. I won't ask a subjective question, but that's what I needed to know. Thank you.

Finance Director Gomez: You're welcome.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, I'm not going to ask a subjective question of you either. Section 9 of the ordinance passing the budget, does it contain the specific salaries in there? The ordinance, the ordinance itself.

City Attorney Suárez: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It mentions it in blank, but does it break down, mayor...?

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, it does, Vice Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: On the resolution.

City Attorney Suárez: On the ordinance.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, on the ordinance, it just says Section 9. It just has a total amount.

Finance Director Gomez: It -- no -- well, it shows -- if I may. So, it shows \$69,000 for the Mayor, \$67,000 for Vice Mayor, \$65,000 for each of the three Commissioners. The monthly local expense allowance shall be adjusted to \$800 monthly and a monthly car allowance shall be provided for each member of the Commission in the amount of \$703.84.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The draft ordinance that was presented last time in Section 9, which did not have that breakdown...

Finance Director Gomez: It did.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It didn't.

Finance Director Gomez: I mean, I have a copy of it. And...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was...

City Attorney Suárez: Let me pull it for you, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, this was not in the draft budget.

Finance Director Gomez: It was not in the draft budget of July. The July 1 budget estimate did not have it, but there was no ordinance with that. That was the budget estimate. During the

summer, there are changes that happen to that budget estimate, but the ordinance at September 13th, I have it in front of me, it did have it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Now, the ordinance that I saw didn't have a breakdown. That's why I had to draw it out of you and ask you what those -- so, the budget itself, when you're talking about changes that were done in the budget, substantial increases such as this are normally done with discussion, are they not?

Finance Director Gomez: I'm sorry?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Substantial increases like this are normally done with discussion.

Finance Director Gomez: There are significant changes to the budget from the budget estimate to the first hearing. From the budget estimate to the first hearing, this year, the net difference of expenditures was \$2.4 million of changes to the budget in the tune of \$2.4 million of expenditures items that changed from July 1 to the first hearing on September 13th. That breakout was also included as a supporting schedule to the ordinance. There are -- as I mentioned earlier, there's about 15 pages of supporting schedules that were attached to the ordinance on first reading that had a lot of the detail of what the changes were and how it affected the July 1 budget.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Is there any reason why you're aware of that you weren't provided this to be put into the draft budget?

Finance Director Gomez: Because at the -- I -- the only thing that I can -- at the time, the July budget, the July 1 budget estimate is prepared in the month of June or being finalized. And it just -- I guess it was not finalized or the -- I don't recall it being finalized by that point for us to include it in the July 1 budget estimate. So, there was not -- I don't know that we had the direction at that point in time. I can't answer if I -- I don't recall having that direction. Had we had that direction, it probably would have been in the July 1 budget, but -- or budget estimate, but I don't believe that we had the direction yet.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so you had no direction in July to do this.

Finance Director Gomez: To put it into the budget estimate.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So -- okay, so it was put in for the final draft of the budget.

Finance Director Gomez: It was put in for the first hearing budget, which was on September 13th, yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. There's a motion on the floor.

Mayor Lago: Second.

City Clerk Urquia: I still have more members of the public requesting to speak on this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, go right ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker -- the rest of the speakers are going to be on Zoom. And the next speaker is Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Cruz: Alright. Well, I find it very interesting. Let me start by the most interesting comments I've heard. The Mayor was upset because employees were being asked questions called interrogation. This morning I was very surprised when the Mayor chose to ask questions from the police officer that was getting an award. I saw him move -- moving around. He wasn't happy. He was being asked, how do you feel about working here, et cetera, et cetera. That was not the moment to do that. But that was okay because the Mayor did it, no problem. Okay, the Mayor is very fast at talking about Mr. Fernandez was at his house, so was I, so were other people. And guess what, Mr. Mayor, we heard you say how tight the money was and how you only work outside the City limits. That has changed, hasn't it? Now we're not tight, now we have a lot of money, but of course, that's why we don't need to ask for a raise. Hello, very clear. Now you know what, Mr. Mayor, you haven't mentioned your pension. How come your pension is so much higher than anybody else's? Oh, maybe because you're the mayor. Okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. This is an attempt to, once again, politicize the issue. That's why we got the dirty emails, the texts. That's why people were called to attend the meeting. You know what? I didn't get a call from any of the people that I have supported. They didn't contact any of the people that I know about. You better show up because I need your support. Other people were calling people. Other people were asking people to send emails. Come on. You know what, we're talking about being transparent? No, this is being a bully. This is trying to bully the three Commissioners to change their minds. Guess what? They should change their minds. They deserve to get a living wage whether you like it or not. You may not need it. You know what? You may not need it because you are doing so very well in your business. Remember, you have to work, you have to earn money. I've heard you say that. You know what? They're choosing to spend most of their time working for the residents, not for their developers, not for people that can help them later, okay? This is the issue. We need to make them feel bad because you know what? You didn't do it. Well, hopefully they are not doing many things that you're doing, and other people are doing, okay? So, having said that, you know what? If the two of you do not want the extra money, you can always not accept it. Because you know what, I remember John F. Kennedy took \$1 a year for his salary. Nobody's forced to take what they don't want. You can say, no, I don't want the salary. Maybe you don't want the insurance either. Maybe you don't want the pension. Okay, I don't hear anybody saying those



things. You know what, let me take what I want and chastise the others for asking. Guess what? I know people that are making a lot of money working for you and don't act surprised that there are assistants that don't make that kind of money because I never knew that we had a chief of staff in the City of Coral Gables. Now we do and the salary goes with the title. So, you know, and there are a lot of people whose salaries were raised. Guess what? Not openly, not at budget time, in between budgets. Okay, because most of us didn't know anything about executive benefits. That was not done during the budget. That was done in between. And I did not hear most of you complain about it. It was okay, but you're (INAUDIBLE) with it. The bottom line is, if you want elected officials to be true to themselves and to their residents, they need to get a salary that does not force them to go and get money from other people. That's the bottom line. And that's what's so shameful about the City nowadays that all we do is criticize. Oh, I want to criticize, but let me tell you, I wouldn't have done it. You know what? There are many things that we wouldn't do either. Alright, have a wonderful day.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Mr. Mayor, is Debra Register.

Mayor Lago: Before we have the next speaker, Raquel, would you do me a favor? Would you explain a little bit about my pension, please?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Sure, Mayor. So, your pension is similar to the other members of the Commission. All of you are members of the Florida Retirement System, so the benefits are based on your salaries. So, as mayor, you have a slightly higher salary than the rest.

Mayor Lago: How much slightly higher?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: I think there's a difference of 8 or \$9,000 difference, but when you were Commissioner, you had a less salary, so your benefits are based on your salary.

Mayor Lago: So, would you...?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: But every -- all the benefits are equal.

Mayor Lago: So, would you say that my pension is pretty much on par with my colleagues?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: You have the same pension, it's just different salaries.

Mayor Lago: So, my point is that, again -- thank you very much -- another example of the continued attacks and the continued comments that are false, that end up getting legs, getting legs, being pushed out there, like they do with the blogs, like they do with all these things that are that are happening. It's the same thing. Again, we don't always have to agree. We can disagree on issues, but again, you're attacking people. You're attacking people's character. You're attacking people and where they stand. So, it's the same thing over and over again. Mr. Clerk.



City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Debra Register.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Register.

Debra Register: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners. My name is Debra Register. I reside at 1240 Placetas Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida. I also am a member of the Budget and Audit Committee. One is we had a meeting and we went over, basically in an hour, which I felt should have been a lot longer, some of the changes. I was upset when we had the last Commission meeting, and if the Commissioners and the Vice Mayor and the Mayor were notified that if the Mayor and the Vice Mayor didn't like the raises, why, when the City Manager met with them, that they didn't take the time to say, I think we need a Sunshine meeting before the first reading. They did a grandstanding at the first meeting of the budget. I was very upset with that. I do agree that I want representation of people of all means. I don't want an elite commissioners who don't have to take the money, and I want everybody to have the opportunity to be elected to the Commission and represent me. So, I don't think that what they're asking, if they've had not had any of these increases since 1980, very small in between as far as raises, not just the adjustment that everybody else gets, that they should be entitled to it. If the directors, if the City Manager, if the City Attorney have auto allowances, the Commissioner should have them. And Mayor, I've heard you talk about going to Tallahassee and courting some of the senators and all, and that the cost should be bared [sic] by the individual Commissioners, I disagree. I think the City and those amounts that they give each month should be used for some of that. But I don't think it should come out of the Commissioner's pocket. I also believe that, you know, each Commissioner has an expense account to send out various different mailings and so forth and so on. So, I just think this was handled poorly by the Mayor and the Vice Mayor, because if you didn't like it, you should have asked for a Sunshine meeting before the last reading. So, one, I am in favor of all adjustments. Thank you very much. Bye.

Mayor Lago: If I may just answer, Ms. Register, and I'd like the Manager, obviously, to advise me if I'm far off on what I'm saying. When the Manager and I had the conversation about this raise, I asked, how was this going to be handled? It's in the budget. The three votes would like to have it in the budget. So, at the end of the day, the Manager has to do what three out of the five - - hopefully, he tries to get five out of five as much as he possibly can. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't. But at the end of the day, we moved forward as a Commission, putting it in the budget, and that was what was requested. Now we're having the discussion here, and the Vice Mayor has placed the item on the agenda and the Commission, and we're talking about it so...

Vice Mayor Anderson: And I think I have to repeat the motion because it seems to have gotten off the railroad tracks. The first motion is just to take it out of the budget and do it, you know, what I consider to be the right way in the Sunshine. Have it as a discussion item, a Sunshine meeting. You know, do an ordinance for first and second reading. Or if it's the will of, you know, the folks that receive notice out here, if they want it to be on the ballot, then we can put it on the

ballot. But, you know, without listening to them on this, we've had a few people that were on the Budget Review Committee and apparently didn't understand that the expense account is separate and apart from the salary increase here. I'm not here to debate the amount of the salary right now. It's the process that was used. You know, for it to show up in the last budget in Section 9 and then have to break it out and then understand, you know, the types of increases, you know, just like you've received emails in favor, I've received emails against. So, you know, if you're only going to listen to one silo of folks, you're not going to get the complete picture. I think it has to be transparent. I think it has to be above board. It has to be, you know, the image that we want residents to see this Commission on as a cohesive Commission that does things in the daylight for the residents to see and not slip it into the last budget.

Mayor Lago: And I think if it's the will of the Commission, if I may, that this could be handled at the next Commission meeting. We could have a Sunshine meeting. We can talk about it. You know, it doesn't have to be handled at the fiscal year, correct, Mr. Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And again, you brought up a very good point. I wouldn't have an issue putting it as a referendum, letting the residents vote. I think that would be a wonderful thing. You know, you'd get a great amount of residents that would come out and voice their opinion in regards to whether this raise, whatever raise it may be, is the appropriate amount. Maybe it should be more. Maybe it should be more for the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Maybe it should.

Mayor Lago: So, I think it will give us time. We can discuss it. We can put it in the referendum. There are several elections coming next year and I think that's a very transparent and open process that we can take advantage of. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Saralane Conde.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Conde, nice to hear from you again.

Saralane Conde: Yes, hi. I'm glad we're having this open discussion. I just wanted to note that I agree with Commissioner Menendez. I think that the salary should be reasonable so that the average person can take the position. You know, it wouldn't be limited to people who can afford it, people who are wealthy and are not representative of everybody in the community. Another thing I wanted to mention is that I think, you know, you always want to pay your police officers and your City officials a reasonable amount of money because you don't want them to be susceptible to corruption, to money under the table, to payments by developers, say. So, I support increasing the salary and the amounts don't seem outrageous. On a household basis, it seems it wouldn't be that much. And I think there's a sense of assurance, not assurance, but a little better

feeling that our public officials are not -- would not be tempted to take bribes. And that's it. Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Always great to hear from you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, next speak...

Ms. Conde: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Sue Kawalerski.

Mayor Lago: Hi, Sue, welcome back. Good to hear from you.

Sue Kawalerski: Yes, yes, thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners. And I'm glad we're having this discussion. I think it should have happened probably a couple of months ago. But some things that were said today are a little disturbing to me. One of the phrases that keeps coming up is this was hid in the budget. It was hidden, somebody hid it in the budget. And I have to tell you, if I was a city manager at that dais right now, I would really be taking offense because there's only one person and one staff that puts a budget together. It's not the Commissioners who type it up and put it in a collated fashion, like Dr. Sokoloff referred to. It's the City staff that puts together the physical budget. So, if you're accusing the City staff, Mr. Manager, I would be very offended by these comments that are being made by the Mayor. I really would because it is the staff that puts it together. It's the staff that highlights. It's the staff that lets the Commissioners know exactly what's in it as they're being debriefed. And apparently, you did a bad job by hiding things. That's all I can say, according to the Mayor. But let me talk more on the subject of leadership. Another thing I was very disturbed about hearing the Mayor say, Mayor Lago, I'm very shocked when you said, when you were debriefed about the salary increases, that you kind of waved it off, that you weren't interested. I have to tell you, my leader, a leader in my city saying, well, I'm not interested in that, you know, that's for another day, instead of taking a leadership position and saying, wait a minute, this could be a flashpoint in this city. This could be a really bad thing for our city, and it could be a very divisive thing for our city if we do not have a Sunshine meeting, if we don't bring the public into this and fully inform them. And Vice Mayor, leadership, where were you with all those breakdowns? Where were you three weeks ago? Where were you a month ago?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was...

Ms. Kawalerski: Were you not debriefed? Excuse me, excuse me. Were you not debriefed? Okay, how come you didn't come out as a leader, the Vice Mayor? We have two leaders here, the Mayor and the Vice Mayor. Neither of you raised the issue of a Sunshine meeting, a referendum, opening this up to the public, let alone putting it on the agenda, on a Commission agenda. Mr. Mayor, you're in charge of the agenda. Why didn't you put this on the agenda as a discussion

item? You know what this looks like? Maybe not corruption, but it sure looks like hanky-panky, okay? It looks like a plot to get the three that are not with you. And I have to tell you, the three that are not with you are for the residents. They're the ones that are for the residents. With that said, we are absolutely for increasing their salaries. You don't have to take them, Mayor and Vice Mayor, but we're all for increasing the salaries to not only \$63,000 -- that isn't even a living wage in this city. I expect those Commissioners not to take bribes, and therefore, I would -- if you don't want them, I would give the raises to those three people who are working on behalf of the residents. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Sue. And let me just clarify.

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

Mayor Lago: Let me just -- we'll close the public comment. So, let me just clarify, if I may. Mr. Manager, did I blow off -- did I blow off the raises? What I said was, very clearly -- what I said was, you already have support to put this in the budget, correct? This has already been addressed. I think we should do it a different way, but obviously, there's support to put this in the budget. I will not be accepting this raise. I don't think it's appropriate, the way it's handled. I don't believe it should be in the budget. And your response was very simple. I have to do the will of the Commission. That's the way it was handled. You can try to spin it any way you want, Sue. I just want you to know that I respect you and I appreciate you, but at the end of the day, that's not what happened. It's not, and the Manager can attest to it. It was not something that I discarded. I was very clear that I would not associate myself with a raise to the Commission that was handled in this fashion. I don't think it's appropriate, and I think it sends the wrong message. And plus, I think the -- like I said before, the raise is egregious. It's a double -- more than a double-digit raise. It could have been handled in a very different way. And I think we've gotten out of line here in regards to a discussion. My children have been brought up, where they go to school, you know, my business, a litany of different things have been brought up over the last few meetings. And again, don't look confused. Mr. Cancio was here. He railed at me for 12 minutes. I gave him more than enough time to insult me and basically degrade me, stating that I should have my kids in public school, that I shouldn't send them to private school, mentioning where they go to school, mentioning that I make money. Listen, guys, we've got to get away from saying that being successful in any way is bad. We all work hard.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We all work hard.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's not -- let's not take this off.

Mayor Lago: We all work hard, but what I'm saying is we need to focus on the issue. And the issue is -- and not spin it in a way. We're having a conversation here, which should have happened

before, and that is on the Commission floor, and there's still time to do this properly. Put this in a Commission agenda or a Sunshine meeting and have a conversation about the compensation, the appropriate compensation, not say things like, you know, well, executives have car allowances when they don't have car allowances or say things that -- on the record that are not correct, and we have to clarify them, like your pension is exorbitant. No, it's not, and then have to bring staff up here and correct that because all that misinformation gets into blogs, gets into the Twittersphere, and then people use it to attack and attack and attack and to weave a narrative that is destructive, not only for elected officials, but also for families of the elected officials. So, I think we can do much better than that. I'm willing to have that conversation. If we don't have the support, we move on. We still have a long agenda, and we have a budget hearing that was supposed to start five minutes ago. So, I think we're done with public comment, unless my colleagues have anything else they'd like to say about this issue.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, I apologize, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, let's...

Mayor Lago: It's your item.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's not forget. This resolution is not about whether you deserve it, whether you've earned it, it's the process so -- which is why I brought it out because it wasn't in the draft budget, because there wasn't a discussion item or a Sunshine meeting or anything done ahead of time, as we've done with a litany of other things from waste management, recycling, and all the other things that we put on for the public to be able to see on a regular agenda. That's why I brought it out because I didn't want to be part of hiding something in a budget when it should have really been more of a Sunshine discussion. I had no idea what number you guys were going to support until it was thrown into the budget. I'm not clairvoyant. So, I did the charts. I did the analysis after the fact, which is not a five-minute job. You have to do all the calculations. You have to put the formulas into the Excel sheet to be able to understand what those numbers mean. That's transparency on it. So, the motion is merely to take it out of the budget. Then, on the second part, you guys can decide what you want to do.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Castro: No.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Commissioner Menendez: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 2-3)

Mayor Lago: Motion fails.