

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item I-5
October 12, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Michael Mena
Commissioner Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Jorge Fors
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Attorney/Intergovernmental Affairs, Naomi Levi-Garcia

Public Speaker(s)

Marangely Vazquez, 911 Operator for the City of Coral Gables
David Renshaw

Agenda Item I-5 [Start: 11:26 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the City's 2022 Legislative Priorities in substantially the attached form.

Mayor Lago: Can we go to I-5, A Resolution of the City Commission approving the City's 2022 Legislative Priorities in substantially the attached form.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: I will keep it short. We have all met individually and gone over our legislative priorities in detail. This resolution establishes it officially. As you know, it is an evolving document, it changes over time. As one session begins and progresses, new issues come to the forefront, and so we have to be very adaptable. This resolution gives us the flexibility to tailor our advocacy as needed. We thank you for that. Right now, Interim Committee Weeks have already begun, that's why our lobbyists are not here, but session officially starts on January 11th. We have some trips already booked. I want to thank the Commission for making themselves available. Two booked, one next week and another in mid-November, potentially more to come. I won't go over each and every item, but I will say that every item on the agenda is designed to further the city's
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interest, protect the city's Home Rule Authority and allow you as the local governing body to best serve the community. We are seeking \$3.7 million dollars in grants this year, including...grants. So, it's going to be a landmark year. We are positive, hopeful and of course committed as always. So, if you have any questions about specific items, I'm happy to take them now.

Vice Mayor Mena: Is the version that you sent me, that's not the one – is that the one attached?

Ms. Levi-Garcia: No.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay. So, one of the things I spoke to Naomi about when we met on this was, I'd like to see us try to organize this in a way that maybe has like sort of, what I'll call primary priorities at the front end, and then, I hate to use the word, secondary, but the rest of the priorities, the balance of the priorities, because it's a very long document. There are a lot of priorities in there, some of them are more specific to Coral Gables, some of them are more broader, sort of topics of interest; and she already went through preparing a draft which she just sent me in the last two days, but I think she did a good job of trying to prioritize those and it's just a suggestion to try to organize it in a way that –

Mayor Lago: I think it's great.

Vice Mayor Mena: You walk into a meeting with a six-page memo and the other thing, we keep adding to this over the years, which is nice and good, but it becomes a more cumbersome document. They are all worthy, good causes and priorities to have, but I think we should try to put however many we want to decide – five, six, whatever it is, that are the most important up front the best we can. We may or may not agree on that, which ones they are, but as best we can to try to just highlight.

Mayor Lago: I think the biggest ones are issues of funding, funding strategy-wise.

Vice Mayor Mena: For sure.

Mayor Lago: So, I think those should be number one and those are the ones that are ever evolving, as those funding goals are met or not met.

Vice Mayor Mena: I think he kept that as a standalone. So, you have the funding stuff, right, which I agree with you, that's number one.

Mayor Lago: That's got to be number one.

Commissioner Anderson: We can put headlines.

City Attorney Ramos: Naomi, because of timing and upcoming meetings, do you want to just go through what you proposed, maybe everybody is okay with it, and you can finalize it.

Mayor Lago: You want to go over that now?
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Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, is your question, what would I prioritize?

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Funding is number one.

Vice Mayor Mena: For sure, for sure. Other than the funding. I agree with you 100 percent, and we talked about that, obviously bringing whatever dollars we can back to our city is critical.

Commissioner Menendez: By the way, I was here in a past life, so we just put her on the spot.

Mayor Lago: While Naomi is going through that, because I just want to give her a few moments. Naomi and I have met with Chelsea four times, five times, we met yesterday for a fourth or fifth time. So, we are planning a visit next weekend. Its going to be a two-day visit, Commissioner Fors is coming with us, and it's a very aggressive schedule in regard to who we are going to be meeting with from the State Legislature and the Senate. I've already started meeting on my own with State Legislators and Senators to address these issues, and I've been very clear of our intent to have a very successful year. Not that we didn't have one last year, but I always want to, again, shoot for as much as possible to deliver the bacon back home for our residents and for our business community. The trip is planned; Naomi and Chelsea and the team have put together a great plan of action. Moving forward, now its our turn to deliver when we go to Tallahassee and hold our Legislators accountable and our Senators and say listen, we need this on behalf of our community. Don't be confused just because we are an affluent community, does not mean we pay our fair share in taxes, both to the county and both to the state, and we are asking you to please, help us allow us to lead, to continue to lead on a litany of different things to service this community. So, our tax base continues to go up so we can afford all the projects and all the plans and all the ideas that are both being proposed at the county and at the state level.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Yes. And just to illustrate what the Mayor is saying. By way of comparison, last year we sought \$575,000 in funding from the state. This year we are seeking close to \$4 million. So, we are taking a different approach, going hard in the paint, so to speak.

Mayor Lago: Yes. I like that.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: So, Vice Mayor Mena and I talked about, how could we update the legislative agenda to add more value. And the idea was, well it could be more succinct, right, because the Commission is very active, we are growing, the legislative agenda is growing annually, we are adding more and more priorities and they are all very important. So, when you ask me to prioritize, I'm not putting anything, I'm not necessarily saying that one is more important than the other, but that some are more all-encompassing. And so, if we were to try to bring some to the forefront, I would go with the preservation of Home Rule, opposition to changes to the Bert Harris Act that are detrimental to the city, preservation of sovereign immunity caps, repeal of the emergency powers, changes that occurred last year, opposition to any attempt to preempt the city's zoning authority and building design elements, changes to the Florida Building Code consistent with what

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we are seeing with Miami-Dade County in terms of lowering the 40-year certification process to 30 years, expansion of the PACE Program. I think its very important as we continue to talk about adapting septic to sewer. We need to make that; we need to create a financing option for individuals to make those connections. And then the changes to virtual meetings. So, I would put those as top priorities for the city and likely the ones that have the greatest chance of success; and then everything else very important, but we could potentially have them on a separate document.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may. A few of the items on these legislative priorities are items that we won't be alone in that battle, that are preemption that affect all cities, which would I guess, involve Florida League of Cities and organizations like that. So, obviously those are important, but we won't be the only ones in that fight. Is there a way to distinguish those issues that aren't a City of Coral Gables exclusive issue and then identify those that are exclusively Coral Gables issues, because I think the ones that are exclusively Coral Gables, I think those are the ones that we can perhaps, in Tallahassee when everyone goes up there to advocate, that we can maybe focus those as unique to Coral Gables, that's just from my own experience.

Vice Mayor Mena: And I think really only the funding though is unique to Coral Gables.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Right. Every statute that comes out is going to have wide-reaching effects on local governments, because they can't single out Coral Gables as like the only city affected.

Commissioner Menendez: Preemption.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: There are certainly issues that are probably more important to us than perhaps other cities, and I could distinguish those for you, and we can definitely focus on those when we go up to advocate in terms of approach, right. I don't know that you necessarily want me to go through a whole other list of what's Coral Gables specific.

Commissioner Menendez: When we have those conversations, to have in mind we're not alone in this fight, but there are other cities that don't care that it is important to us, perhaps but not to other cities, so just to have that in our play when we go forward.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Sure – of course. We always think about that.

Vice Mayor Mena: One of the other things I talk to Naomi about is, we also have to be realistic about the items when you speak to legislators on these certain items, and you have to be realistic about which items are there actual room for discussion on, and frankly, which are there not. You are not going to go up to Tallahassee and persuade legislators to change their mind on their position on assault weapons, for example, you're not. They have their position already, a topic that I'm sure in whatever election they ran in to get elected was discussed. It's an important topic to everybody on one side or the other, but you're not going to, Coral Gables is not going to go to Tallahassee and persuade Legislator X to go do a whole set of changes, that's not going to happen. So, as we go up there trying to make an impact on things that affect us, for example, even though that's a very important topic, I don't think its necessarily something that's important for us to prioritize in these meetings, because what are we really doing.

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Ms. Levi-Garcia: Sure. I would even go one step further and advise you, maybe you don't want to even mention this when we meet with this person.

Vice Mayor Mena: I agree.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Because its not going to help us.

Vice Mayor Mena: Its not going to go anywhere.

Commissioner Menendez: And spend our political capital in that effort.

Mayor Lago: To give more credence to the Vice Mayor's comments, that's why I'm focusing on money, focusing on services, on issues where, again, environmental issues which are now becoming broadly approved, by not only one party, but all parties, because again, there is a nexus between our economic viability here in South Florida. So, let's focus on those issues that, to me, could really, like I said before, bring home the bacon.

Commissioner Menendez: I want to focus on one item that we've discussed and I'm still waiting for the administration to provide the information, the local option fuel tax, which is money that the city has, all cities are entitled to tap into, but the statute reads in a limited way. That money you can tap into, if you are going to use it for A, B, and C. At the City of Miami we were able to add a D, E, and F, and all of a sudden more uses were available for the city; and that would be more money, different uses for the city that we can tap into, but I'm just asking for the Manager's help with this, to have his staff identify the additional uses that we can add to the statute that would give the city more flexibility in accessing funds from Tallahassee going forward, because I think we have a placeholder, but that's money that we could access which is, I think, key in this economic environment.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Thank you Commissioner, we did talk about that.

Commissioner Anderson: And I agree with you all to prioritize the funding issues. I'll share with you since we are in the Sunshine. I have spoken to each one of our Representatives at every meeting I get an opportunity to, and there is an appetite to at least provide us a rebuttable presumption to be able to counter it on tree canopy issues, so that we at least can come in and say, no, that is not a dangerous tree and have another option. So, I would not shy away from that, and we can pursue that issue as well.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Do we need a, it's a resolution, right, so can I get a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: Motion.
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Commissioner Anderson: Second.

Mayor Lago: We have two speakers. Go ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: So, the first speaker is Ms. Marangely Vazquez.

Ms. Vazquez: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Ms. Vazquez: Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager. My name is Marangely Vazquez, and I am a 911 Supervisor with the City of Coral Gables. I've been doing this for 22 years. I am basically here to ask to place, this is my first time speaking in the Commission.

Mayor Lago: Take your time.

Ms. Vazquez: I need to kind of gather my thoughts and then go from there.

Mayor Lago: Take your time.

Ms. Vazquez: Basically, I'm here to ask to place reclassifying the 911 Operators on the legislative priorities. To this day, 911 Operators are not considered essential or First Responders in the State of Florida. At a federal and state level, they are classified the same as taxicab dispatchers and clerical workers. The 911 Safe Act was introduced into Congress in 2019 to classify dispatchers. However, state and federal officials say that the effort is to start with the cities and with counties. Telecommunicators save lives and reclassifying them as First Responders would grant them respect and practical benefits. 911 Officers are part of the critical infrastructure of public safety and are trained and certified as 911 Public Safety Telecommunicators by the State of Florida. They play a crucial role in emergency response as the first line of communications. Essentially, they are the first ones on scene, often providing life-safety instructions even before Police or Fire arrive. They are the lifeline to Police, Fire and medical response. They send them to calls and make sure they make it home safely. They deal with stressful situations and makes split-second decisions. Information gathered and relayed can mean the difference between life and death for field responders. I'm not sure if you are familiar with next generation 911, but its basically a new technology, when people call 911, the 911 dispatchers can send a link and that enables the camera, basically its live footage, so this is becoming the new thing for 911 centers. So, with the introduction of next generation 911, they are now subjected to graphic photographs, audio, and live video streaming from scenes of emergency and often traumatic situations. They often suffer from PTSD by answering multiple traumatic calls, radio incidents, and communicating with people often in states of distress, fear or injury, and unlike Police or Fire, they seldom get the opportunity to decompress or debrief before handling the next situation. First Responder means someone designated or trained to respond to an emergency; 911 responds to emergencies every single day and deserve to be recognized as such. For the city some of the benefits of reclassifying dispatchers would be a more accurate classification. It would bring emergency communication professionals

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closer in line with other public safety personnel. It would recalculate work periods under FLSA, which would allow much more flexibility, distribute employees more effectively and improve operations. Right now, the city we are experiencing shortages of operators or try exploring different scheduling avenues. Right now, we can't do any of that because we are still subject to clerical rules under the FLSA. Being reclassified would allow for an exception, just like nurses, they would be able to work 12 hours, 3 days off, we are not subject to 24/7. Being reclassified would allow more federal funding for training and mental health, would allow access to better insurance rates, more grant dollars and subsidies, would reduce the risk and impact of PTSD and compassion fatigue, which cost negative morale, job burnout and undermine retention. Once again, I am asking to add this item to the list of legislative priorities for the city so that our lobbyists can focus on the reclassification. By doing this, the city would be a pioneer in the State of Florida. It would be a model for other cities to emulate. This would alleviate issues of recruitment and retention. Well trained and qualified operators would be lining up just to work in the city.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker is Mr. David Renshaw.

Mr. Renshaw. Good morning again. David Renshaw with Teamsters Local 769. As Mara clearly professionally articulated, that job within itself is extremely demanding. I've been there multiple times and it is as calm as a Sunday morning and in an instant the whole position modifies into an emergency, and they do so, and they do so in such a professional manner as how they are trained. That is the first line of defense when the public calls. That is the first line of defense for our men and women in the Police and Fire Department. I can't think of a more conducive item than this that benefits the city as-a-whole. As Mara also articulated stated, when that phone call is done, whether its to deal with a baby that can't breathe, a father that is not breathing, they quickly address that. They quickly get the emergency needs there; and then they pause, guess what, the pause is over with, here comes the next call. And that is how its done. And with that, I want to share with you that we at International Brotherhood of Teamsters, as well as Teamsters Local 769 in Miami, Florida, will proudly endorse this. I will also bring to the table and present to the city body and to the City Managers actuaries of what we are looking at, including examples from other municipalities that have gone down this road and outlined the enormous success that it has for the employees, for the city, and for the men and women that serve. I just wanted to take a moment to thank all of the 911 Telecommunicators and Operators for their hard work and due diligence and the police officers and the firefighters of the City of Coral Gables. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it sir.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, before the next meeting, if you'd be so kind, can you have a conversation with Raquel. This is not a conversation to have in public, this is obviously a union negotiation potential issue. We are going to be visiting Tallahassee on multiple occasions, we already have two meetings scheduled. We can always amend our priorities, but I don't want to

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have a discussion in public or consider this request before Raquel has vetted it, along with your team, because several things, several statements have been made regarding the impact of this reclassification and I want to make sure that we have both sides of the story and that we continue to really understand the implications of any changes made in regards to negotiations and our pension.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I will speak to Raquel and brief you before the Tallahassee trip.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. We are going to take a five-minute break, so we can use the bathroom and then we'll move onto the time certain.

City Attorney Ramos: Did we vote on that one?

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry?

City Attorney Ramos: Did we vote?

City Clerk Urquia: They did not.

Commissioner Menendez: I made a motion, I think, Rhonda seconded.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes, we moved.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)