

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Items 2-1 and E-3 are related**  
**September 25, 2025**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson**  
**Commissioner Melissa Castro**  
**Commissioner Ariel Fernandez**  
**Commissioner Richard D. Lara**

**City Staff**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**  
**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**  
**Historic Preservation Officer, Anna Pernas**  
**Public Works Director, Hermes Diaz**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Alejandro Silva, Vice Chair Historic Preservation Board**  
**Maria Cruz**  
**Karelia Carbonell**  
**Joseph Fadel**

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Agenda Items 2-1 and E-3 [Start: 12:00 p.m.]

2-1: A Resolution of the Historic Preservation Board requesting that the City Commission consider the Historic Preservation Board's previous discussions regarding the location of the Gondola Building as well as the previously issued Certificate of Appropriateness for the reconstruction and location of The Gondola Building prior to approving the proposed new location and proceeding pursuant to Section 1-104 of the City Zoning Code.

E-3: A Resolution of the City Commission pursuant to Zoning Code Article 1, "General Provisions," Section 1-104 "Jurisdiction and applicability," approving the location of the Gondola Building, located at the site of Biltmore Hotel Golf Course,

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Coral Gables, Florida; a lengthy legal description is on file; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, and providing for an effective date.

Mayor Lago: All right. We have a time certain item at 12 o'clock. 2-1 and E3.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, 2-1 is a resolution of the Historic Preservation Board requesting that the City Commission consider the Historic Preservation Board's previous discussions regarding the location of the Gondola Building as well as the previously issued Certificate of Appropriateness for the reconstruction and location of the Gondola Building prior to approving the proposed new location and proceeding pursuant to Section 1-104 of the City's Zoning Code.

Mayor Lago: Madam Director? Sorry. I'm sorry. I apologize.

City Attorney Suarez: No, sorry, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me.

City Attorney Suarez: E3 is a resolution of the City Commission pursuant to Zoning Code Article 1, General Provision Section 1-104, Jurisdiction and Applicability, approving the location of the Gondola Building located at the site of Biltmore Hotel Golf Course, Coral Gables, Florida. A lengthy legal description is on file, providing for repeal of provisions, severability clause, and providing for an effective date. This is a quasi-judicial item, so I will ask that the Clerk please swear in all individuals will be testifying today.

City Clerk Urquia: Those who will be testifying on this item, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear a firm testimony you'll provide today will be the truth and nothing but the truth?

Public Works Director Diaz: I do.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Historic Preservation Officer: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. I'm Anna Pernas, Historic Preservation Officer. I want to introduce to you our Vice Chair, Alex Silva, who's going to present our resolution. We also have a Board member, Kelley Schild, as well.

Mayor Lago: How are you, sir?

Mr. Silva: Good. How are you? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor, members of the Commission, and Mr. City Manager for allowing me to speak to you today about this item. My name is Alejandro Silva, with offices at 135 San Lorenzo Avenue, Suite 880, Coral Gables, Florida. I come before you today as Vice Chair of the Coral Gables Historic Preservation Board, representing our Board. I know you've all read the item and the backup material, so I'll just briefly

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summarize the issues. The Gondola Building was an original accessory historic structure of the Biltmore Hotel complex. Constructed in 1925, it was the launching point for George Merrick's imported Italian gondolas. The gondolas were used to provide canal tours for prospective buyers and reinforce Merrick's vision of the city as a Mediterranean-inspired paradise. The original building fell into disrepair, and in 2019, the city applied for and received a grant from the State of Florida to reconstruct an exact replica of the structure. Plans were generated, and the project moved into the permanent approval process. With the building coming to the Historic Preservation Board in December of 2024 for review, where the Board unanimously passed a motion to approve the application as presented, which was a full reconstruction on the original site. Since then, the City has decided to invoke Zoning Code Section 1-104, which allows the City to bypass any normally required Board review and go directly to the City Commission for approval. The City's new proposal is to locate the Gondola Building to a different site within the Biltmore Hotel property. Now, this was not a decision made in a vacuum. I respect the City Manager and his hard-working staff, and personally, I'm very glad he's come back for another term of service to the City. I understand the attempt to balance all of the City's concerns on this particular issue and the recommendation to move the proposed site for the reconstruction of the Gondola Building. I would, however, urge the Commission to review the conclusion that moving the site is the best way forward for this project. When our Board considered the original application for the project, it became clear that the most authentic, correct, and viable solution was for the Gondola Building to remain in its current and original location. The Secretary of Interior Standards for Historic Preservation was very clear on this, stating that, quote, changes that create a false sense of historical development shall not be undertaken, end quote. The integrity of a building's location and setting is a key factor in determining its historical significance. The standards recognize that a building's site and environment are defining characteristics of its historic character, and moving a building severs this connection. Now, will reconstructing the building in its original site possibly disrupt the operations of the golf course? Honestly, the answer is most likely yes. During construction, leaving it on its current site will most likely require a temporary asphalt path for construction access. This could be managed effectively by the selected contractor with deliveries onto the site, managed for off hours either before or after the golf course is in operation. We recognize this would most likely slightly lengthen the construction time period as well, but these temporary, and I stress the word temporary, challenges should be overridden by the fact that overcoming them will result in a building that is sited in its original, historically accurate site for another 100 years. Public Works and the City Manager have reviewed this project under a strict framework of costs and operational concerns from the Biltmore, which we all acknowledge, but we believe strongly that leaving the building in its original location is the right thing for the city to do, not only from a historic preservation standpoint, but from a public access standpoint, and for a possible future adaptive reuse as well. Leaving the building in its original site allows for more public access and allows the city and the Biltmore Hotel to plan for any future adaptive reuses,

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which we would highly encourage as a Historic Preservation Board, of the building as a cafe, a simple, elegant rest station for golfers, or as a permanent historical exhibit. When George Merrick conceived of this building back in 1925, he carefully and thoughtfully placed it almost at the center of his grand golf course. He placed it in the widest portion of the canal, bisecting the course specifically to create a lagoon-like romantic setting for the launching of these gondolas that he imported from Italy to reinforce his grand vision of Coral Gables as a Mediterranean revival city. The placing of this beautiful gem of a building at this specific location, I would argue, is another one of the city's gestural vignettes, no different than the De Soto Fountain or Granada Entrance or any of the plazas along Coral Way. The Gondola Building in this location evokes the beautiful renderings of Denman Fink that we're all familiar with as iconic images of the city. The building is an important and interesting part of our city's history.

Moving the Gondola Building to the proposed obscure location where it would be hidden from public view, and most importantly, break an important connection to the city's past, would be a grave disservice to our history and our residents. As a proud citizen of Coral Gables and member of our Coral Gables Historic Preservation Board, I respectfully request that you reconsider the relocation of the Gondola Building and direct Public Works to proceed with the Historic Preservation Board's original recommendation to reconstruct it on its original historic site. Thank you very much for your time and your consideration.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your service, by the way, and I appreciate you being here. Thank you. I know you're very, very busy.

Mr. Silva: Thanks.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to touch on a few points. Do you want to hear from staff?

City Attorney Suarez: Yes, Mayor. I think you should have the staff presentation.

Public Works Director Diaz: Good afternoon. Hermes Diaz, Public Works Director. The presentation, I'll touch on a few points that has already been discussed, so I'll try to be brief. Just general history, the Biltmore Hotel, the construction began in 1924. An original accessory building, 15 to 25 gondolas used to be stored there for access to Tahiti Beach and Biscayne Bay. In December 2024, the Historic Preservation Board passed a motion recommending the approval of the reconstruction of the Gondola Building at its current location. On August 14, 2025, we made them aware that we would be coming to Commission, that we were going to invoke Section 1-104 of the zoning code, and we're going to ask the Commission for approval to relocate it. That's a map of the original location of the Gondola Building, and these are some photos of the building prior to its collapse. We are actively working on plans for the reconstruction of the building. You know,

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trying to maintain and reuse as much of the features of the building that can be reused. The following map shows the original building location and the new proposed location further downstream along the canal. This is a little bit of a blow-up of the new location adjacent to the path. Now, why do we think the proposed location is better? First of all, it's going to be more accessible to the public from Bird Road. You have a decreased likelihood of disruption from golfing activities, not only during construction, but after construction. Increased safety for both patrons and golfers. Better access to construction equipment and personnel. Reduced risk of damage to the historically recognized golf course due to construction activities. And I want to point out that the Biltmore Hotel does support the new location, and that location has been accepted by the grantor and the State of Florida Division of Historical Resources. That's it.

Mayor Lago: All right. Thank you, Mr. Director. First off, I'd just like to briefly acknowledge our friends from the board. Thank you for being here. Thank you for giving of your service, your time. I know you're very busy and we appreciate your expertise. Thank you very much. Also, to the staff, amazing work. To the City Manager, this has been a point of contention for some time. I just want to ask you a few questions just to refresh my memory because I don't remember everything. I remember when I went to Tallahassee with the Vice Mayor, we advocated for appropriations for this project. Do you know what the amount was exactly?

Public Works Director Diaz: I want to say \$750,000.

Mayor Lago: And do you know when that was?

Public Works Director Diaz: 2019, something like that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: 2020, 2021.

Mayor Lago: 2021, okay. I just want to make sure people understand that. To really give the context, the time that this is taking.

Public Works Director Diaz: Correct.

Mayor Lago: This is a very complex project, not because of its size, just because you're talking about the historic nature.

Public Works Director Diaz: The location.

Mayor Lago: The location. And we were able to get almost \$800,000 from the state. And I want to be thankful to the state. I want to thank our state Representatives. I want to thank our state Senators, our Governor. Thank you for making this appropriation happen. If it wasn't for you, along with our amazing team, we had Chelsea that worked there. We had Naomi. We had, who else did we have that went up with us? Well, the Commissioners back then. This is an important,

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important piece of our history. And with that being said, it's also a complicated part of our history. And let's talk about it very candidly. And I think we need to have a candid conversation and leave the politics aside. I'm not a historic preservationist, but I have a deep, deep love for it. Obviously being the Mayor of the city, what we've done with the Whiteway Lights. I found the George Fink studio to buy and a lot of things that we've been doing. But this was a complicated one for me. I would love to have it in its original location, but I went to see its original location. How many people, honestly, in our community go out there to take a look at this building? How many people really understand what this building is? Right now, even if you were to go out there, by the way, I'm not a golfer. I've never played around the golf. I'm not saying it's not fun. It probably is. I just have never played golf. If the golf is going on, if a game of golf is going on and you're next to this building, it's a liability, correct? I mean, I leave that for the attorneys.

It could be an issue, correct?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll follow up on some of that.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, I'll leave it up to the Vice Mayor, who's more of an expert than I am on that front. So, first and foremost, you really don't get that much access to it, and I respect what the gentleman was saying because he's a truest. He wants it the way it was, and I respect that. I'm going to go a little further. This building, in my opinion, needs to be treasured and needs to be used. People need to see it every day. I thought it would be the most appropriate to have it next to the tennis center in one form or another, to have it used by the Garden Club, to have it used by the Girl Scouts, to have it used by Historic Preservation so they can have their meetings there. We can have a little, maybe a museum, to use it, to use the building, to really touch the building, to understand the building. It's a major part of our history that I'm pretty sure a lot of people, or a majority of the people in this community, have never even seen it because of the location it's in because a lot of people don't golf. A lot of people don't go to the Biltmore. To play around the golf at the Biltmore is \$200 plus sometimes. It's expensive. You've got to go out there. It's not like you can be in the Biltmore and you're going to see it from one of the ballrooms or anything like that. You've got to make a trek out there to make sure you get it, and you look at it closely.

Public Works Director Diaz: A lot of steps.

Mayor Lago: A lot of steps, which is fine. It is what it is. It's just like those beautiful bridges that are out there. They're stunning. If you get close to those bridges out there, you really acknowledge how exceptional they are. So, I know that we don't have the ability to move it to a tennis center. But one thing that I want my Commission to think about, if they don't want to do it, I won't waste the time. I was thinking about reaching out to the Senate President and the Speaker of the House and saying, we're going to move this. We're going to move this. Let's move it to somewhere where

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it can be used, where it can actually get real admiration, where people can see it. Move it next to the tennis center, adjacent to the tennis center. Now we're going to have the pickleball courts. You could have something very well done, manicured, landscaped, something that could be done so it could be used, and it could be treasured. And we could have other boards use it. So that's what I just wanted to put it out there. I'm willing to write a letter with my colleagues in the Commission signing it, saying if we're going to move it, we should move it to something that, again, in my opinion, I think is a little bit more in line with what would get more use. Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor. Thank you. Thank you, Mayor. That was our preferred site because we feel like parks can do some amazing programming in that building. And the people will appreciate more what they see than what they don't see. So that was our number one preferred site. However, the state required it to be adjacent to water. But that would certainly, we completely agree that that would be our preferred site because I think people would appreciate the building. And it's hard to appreciate what you don't see.

Mayor Lago: I'm willing to move forward today. And if I could just write a letter, if my colleagues, I don't want to write a letter to an elected official of this magnitude without approval from my colleagues in the Commission. I want to make sure that I get the appropriate approvals from all my colleagues on this matter. If you're interested, we move forward. I will write a letter to the State Senate President, to our State Representative, Speaker of the House, Danny Perez, to the Governor. And we ask for this opportunity. We send them an actual map showing where it is currently right now, where the state is stating for it to be put, and where we feel, not because it's a convenience for it. I think it's just better for the community to really look at this. I see people stand in front of the Fink Studio after the renovation that we did, and they are mesmerized at the beauty of the Fink Studio. They spend time looking at it. It's an exceptional building. I think this building should have the same opportunity. Commissioner?

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I was really torn by just hearing about this during my agenda review and just trying to figure out the best path forward. Because, like our Board Vice Chair, I'm also a truest. I think it should be at that same location. But I have been to that location. I have walked that area. Actually, we drove through there on 4th of July last year. And it's not a good location for any use. Just because of how distant it is, and how dangerous it is on the golf course. So, one of the things that I thought of is, is there a way to keep it on the property? And I think when you start looking into the history of the Biltmore, and I only found this out when I started doing research for an article when I was a Gables Insider. And I sat down with our archivist, and we started going through old files. The number of buildings that were on that property at one point was incredible. There were over 30 buildings on there. It was hard to figure out which ones were the original ones, and which ones were new. Just because of how much that property had been built out over the years for the hospital's needs, and for the VA's needs. But I think the location near the tennis center

is probably the one that would have the most use and the least liability when it comes to the golf course. Having walked that area as well, looking for a location for pickleball. And I liked your idea of a coffee shop. I think that would be a great location for a coffee shop, very similar to what we have at Granada Golf Course in Le Parc. I forgot the name all of a sudden. But something like that, where you don't just have to be going to the tennis center or to the Biltmore to enjoy that coffee shop. You could just be driving around. You could say, you know what, I'm going to go to the coffee shop at the Gondola Building. And I think that would be a location that would be beneficial. I think, Mr. Mayor, the letter idea is phenomenal. I think Tallahassee is always concerned about the division that they've seen in the news of this city. Why don't we all sign the letter?

Mayor Lago: That's what I said.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think we should all sign the letter and show a sign of unity that we are behind this as a Commission supportive of ensuring that the Gondola Building remains on the Biltmore property, but in a location that is safe, accessible, that is not contingent on storms. Because we have a hurricane, water comes up that waterway, and all of a sudden, we have storm damage to the building. I think it's a great idea, and I think it's something that can really get this community behind a historic preservation project, slight relocation on property. But we watch the videos online all the time of historic buildings being relocated to save them. And the incredible work that's done to relocate them, you would never figure out that they had been someplace else. And right now, it's an eyesore. We need to do something. We need to move on this. I think the time is now, and let's try to find a way forward.

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Mayor, I'm going to cover some items that weren't covered because I understand the pain of trying to make a decision on where to move this building. I had the opportunity long before I ran for office to go out on the golf course. I was trying to get in condition to go on a major hike with my girls, who are 30 years younger plus than me, out to Yosemite and do half doom.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, you're 21.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, yeah. So, I was out there running with my dogs and going up and down the hills and stuff, and I would go over the bridges and so forth. You couldn't see the Gondola Building. In fact, no one saw the Gondola Building. No one got the experience of Gondola Building. Then I was elected, and I went out to see the Gondola Building. Mr. Brett Gillis was with me, and I tried to warn him about the golf balls because I was familiar with looking for the golfers to make sure that they were hitting the balls away from me when I was out there doing my



training. And lo and behold, of course, he didn't quite watch the golfers, and he got hit in the head, and it was severe, and he had to go to the hospital. The building was already in very bad condition at the time, and the final blow, I understand, was a tractor, one of the lawn tractors backed into it. It's in a bad location. I also studied the soil, the elevation. I know we have an amazing engineer that can fix everything, but the reality is water levels are getting higher. I had the opportunity when I went to the League of Cities to meet with some other managers, and I was unpleasantly surprised that some cities in our state are going to go underwater very shortly because St. Augustine is only 12 inches above sea level, 12 inches. So, all those wonderful historic buildings are going to be lost unless some drastic measures are taken. I don't know that you can save St. Augustine, but we can save the Gondola Building, and we can put it somewhere where it is not hazardous to your life because if that golf ball hits in the wrong spot on your head, you're gone, where people can actually enjoy it. So, I will take the blame for trying to move it further east along the waterway because I was so concerned about life safety. The last thing we want to do is put something out there that's a gem, and people want to go see it. And how are we going to feel if they get hurt? How are we going to feel if a child gets hit in the head with a golf ball and ends up in a hospital or worse? At that point, the purpose of a historic reservation is lost because people don't get to enjoy it. So that's why I'm in favor of moving it.

Mayor Lago: So, thank you, Vice Mayor. On Item E-3, is the Commission in favor of amending this resolution to add a letter from the Commission to our State Senate President or to the Speaker of the House, to the Governor, obviously the appropriate departments at the state level, with a detailed letter talking about sea level rise, use, prior accidents. For example, if Brett Gillis will allow us, maybe he can write even a letter stating that he's an individual who's been very involved in the city, historic preservationist, and he actually was hit by a golf ball. I think that would be impactful and send a message. There actually should be records of him actually going to the hospital. Talking about, we know we have to move it, and this is where the prescribed location is to move the Gondola Building, but we're thinking about this building and why, and detail that letter, and then have the entire Commission sign it and forward it. Obviously, we have some time, not a lot, but we can put this together in the next week or so, two weeks. I'll send it to the leaders at the state level, and hopefully we get a response, and we'll have the lobbying team respond accordingly and follow up on that measure, and I'll reach out to the elected officials, and hopefully we can get them to get a little bit of a better understanding. I think we should put a map that really explains things, photos of the Gondola Building, address issues one by one by one, and see if we have a little bit of luck.

Commissioner Fernandez: A quick question for the City Attorney. The language that is currently on there regarding it being next to the water, what is that language exactly? Do you have that?

City Attorney Suarez: That's a requirement from the grant.

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Commissioner Fernandez: But what is the written? I just want to see what the actual wording is.

City Attorney Suarez: Yeah. I don't have that language. I think that perhaps our budget director can provide that.

Budget Director Rodriguez: Good afternoon, Assistant Finance Director for Budget Compliance. So, we're looking back at our conversations with the grantor. We had several conversations back and forth over the last couple of years about the location. Originally, we were proposing doing it at the Kerdyk Center, and they expressed concern about the location. And so I'm looking back to the original e-mails where they stated that their preference was one location over the bridge closer to Kerdyk but still on the waterway, and they gave us four locations on the waterway because they felt that it was more historically significant and in line with the fact that the building was used for gondolas, which were used along the waterway. But I'm going to look for the specific e-mails back and forth. I don't believe that it's outlined in the grant, but it's been in our communications back and forth with them to identify.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm just trying to think outside the box here, because maybe we can add a feature outside the building with maybe a fountain or a pool that commemorates the gondola portion of it, and it would satisfy their needs and requirements. I'm just thinking outside the box, put that on your....something that will just showcase what it was. It doesn't have to be on the waterway, but we can create something there that mimics what its original purpose was with a gondola there, something to that effect.

Mayor Lago: I think it's a great idea.

Budget Director Rodriguez: I don't know what would satisfy their requirements, but suggestions are welcome.

Mayor Lago: We're trying to figure something out.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, exactly. With those requirements, sometimes as long as there's water there, they're okay with it. It doesn't necessarily have to be the actual waterway where it was.

Mayor Lago: And I think that if we engage the Senate President and the Speaker of the House, I think we explain the reason why, and we actually have evidence providing reasons. We talk about sea level rise, we talk about safety, examples and testimonials from people. We put together a comprehensive letter. I think that it may resonate that we're trying to do the right thing. At the end of the day, I want to pass a resolution. We've got to move forward with this. We've got to rebuild this, because it's an eyesore in the city. The gentleman in the back, you want to say one thing. Please come up, just because we're trying to move on the agenda. Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: And perhaps we can invite them over and show them on site.

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Speaker: Thank you. Thank you very much for your comments. I live on the Guardado Golf Course, so I am very familiar with the skill level of our Gables golfers. So, I appreciate all your concerns and all the comments. I'm not going to reiterate our position. We do think it's the more historically accurate thing to leave it in its place. If it does, however, need to be moved in the way the winds are blowing, it seems like that's going to happen, the great public benefit that would come from moving it would be better access. So, if the grantor rejects your letter and insists on having it along the waterway, I would really request that the city make a really concerted effort to provide access to whatever site is done. If it's moved to the location where it's being proposed now that maybe funding gets added to really provide true public access from Bird or from wherever it may be, because if it does move, then to me that is the only benefit that the city would be getting, this greater access and true access.

Mayor Lago: But can I be frank with you? We can have this conversation back and forth all day, and I value your input. It means a lot. But can you imagine if you put this Gondola Building in the middle of a golf course, even if you did do a trail, how many people are going to go out and walk all the way into the golf course to go look at the Gondola Building? Or when you can have it, for example, where there's a brand-new parking lot where it's lit next to a tennis center where people can use it in the mornings, for example, the Garden Club or another group in the community. I'm just saying that's where I'm all for the historic purity of it, but I'm also lost in the fact that I want people to use the building. We're making a \$2 million investment, and we want to make sure that people get to use it.

Speaker: I hear you. I hear you. And if it does move, but if the grantor rejects that location in the tennis center, then I would just ask that if it does move to that other location, we do provide access, which is possible. It's very close to Bird Road, so that's doable. Thank you again.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir, Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor. Due to the fact that we thought we were going to have these issues on the location of the building, the structure of the building has been designed that it can easily accommodate all these sites. It's just a matter of changing the actual site plan, and maybe we can get some work or something in the building that would go with the gondola concept. So, we will be looking at that.

Mayor Lago: Can you do me a favor? Can you work with your staff and my office, and also Chelsea from your office, and basically start putting together a letter and basically addressing all the comments that we've made here so we can be prepared to reach out to the state?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor. We'll do that for the Commission. Yes.

Mayor Lago: I'd like to see if we can reach out and send that, and then I'll make personal phone calls and meet with our state legislators to see how we can find an opportunity to maybe address all the matters and meet the needs of the grant but also give this opportunity to truly shine.

City Manager Iglesias: Of course, Mayor. Will do.

Mayor Lago: So, we have E-3 and with a friendly amendment, as I mentioned before.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Okay, go ahead.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. This is a deja vu moment. Years ago, some of us stood in this Chamber, and we called what happened to the Gondola Building demolition by neglect. I guess we were looking ahead, and we knew what the plan was at that time. That building was a problem where it was, and we let it go this way so we could justify moving it. I'm sorry. You know what? I hope I don't live long enough to see other historical buildings that by convenience, we're going to find another place to put them as long as we put the building someplace. That was not the way it was designed. That was not the way we thought it should be at that time. At this time, I'm sure if we were to talk to some of the people that were here, then they would say, I told you so. There had to be a reason to let it get so bad that we could move it.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I'm going to go to Zoom next.

Mayor Lago: Before we do that, I'd like to respond accordingly because again, misinformation in an effort to mislead. Again, this building and to say that anyone on this Commission or a previous Commission allowed this building to deteriorate, to move the building. It's absolutely ridiculous and shameful. And it's the constant rhetoric that comes from individuals that don't understand what happens. We went to Tallahassee, and we almost got a million dollars in appropriations to make sure we could save the taxpayers in this community. What we had to do. We've made a commitment to historic preservation. Just off the, just off the bat. We've spent millions of dollars on renovating the George Fink studio. We've spent millions of dollars on the Venetian pool. We're going to spend tens of millions of dollars on City Hall. We have in our sites the Water Tower,

which is something that we've been working on. We've had countless meetings on to figure out a way that's going to cost us \$2 million dollars?

City Manager Iglesias: \$2 million dollars.

Mayor Lago: \$2 million dollars. We're in the process of finding a way now to ensure that once you spend those \$2 million dollars, we don't have to do it every 10 years because of the structure of the building. What else am I forgetting that we've done here in regard to historic buildings? Oh, the Museum, millions of dollars in the Museum. To say, I'm sorry, the Whiteway Lights. Thank you, Commissioner. I think it was \$2.3 million dollars. That was an item that I worked on. I can't believe I forgot that and there's other items. To get up here and say that we do not support historic preservation. It's just a continued effort, a continued effort to mislead. And then it could go up and say that we intentionally allow this building to fall down. Do you think I want to hear from any one of my colleagues at this building fell down? I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous. It's absurd. A tractor hit it. And it was already in extremely bad shape. We should have taken care of it, and we didn't. And now we are. And we just have a difference of opinion in regard to where the location should be. But at the end of the day, if the state says no, the state says, no, we're going to put it where they say. We just think that it'd be, in my opinion, and I think the opinion of my colleagues, I don't want to speak for them. They haven't voted yet. We just want people to see it. We want people to use it. We want people to see its splendor. It's a beautiful building. So again, I know, I know that we are in a continued effort. To see a negative, negative narrative in an effort to hurt people and get sound bites and all kinds of crazy things, but it doesn't work. It didn't work in the last election, and it doesn't work now. Let's conduct ourselves like professionals and not lie. Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we also spent millions of dollars on Miracle Theater.

Mayor Lago: Miracle Theater. So, I mean, we can keep going and going and going. Which one?

Unidentified Speaker: Merrick House.

Mayor Lago: Merrick House. By the way, I wrote the piece of legislation that required that asked us to put the, put the wall back, which we had in a photo that we found that one of the Merrick House members brought to my attention. It's never ending. It's never ending. Historic preservation is part of our DNA and it's never ending. And thank God because that's what makes, makes our city so beautiful. So, moving on. Mr. Clerk, you said we had another, another...

City Clerk Urquia: We have additional speakers on Zoom, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker on Zoom is going to be, I believe to be Karelia Carbonell.

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Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell. Good afternoon. You want to go back to her? She's got it. Okay.

Ms. Carbonell: Hello.

Mayor Lago: Hey, how are you?

Ms. Carbonell: Hi, everyone. Fine. Thank you. I've, you know, as you know, Mayor, with all due respect, I have been, just being a proponent of this Gondola Building and I have to say, and I am a witness to this. You and I were in the office when the Gondola Building, we realized it had collapsed. And you personally called and really started conversations about the funding so that the city didn't have to, you know, take, take the full, you know, the full cost. So, I am a testament to that. And I really thank you because you, you took that on, and you called, and I heard you. And then of course, the other thing is, I support the Historic Preservation Board's resolution. I, you know, from the beginning, it's, you know, it's a Gondola Building and of course it should never have collapsed, but it did. And, you know, it was part of the, the historic designation obviously of the Biltmore hotel. And, you know, I do want to read, and it's just one paragraph that talks about it, but I'm all for adaptive reuse as well. And, you know, again, I also, want to say that Mr. Silva, when he said, you know, if it has to be moved, you know, let's try and move it to somewhere where it's on the waterway. Cause that's really where, you know, this building, and of course to have access to it. Obviously the third would be, you know, somewhere else, but, if I can just say that, but, you know, I do want to thank you there. The reason we have 700 and I don't know if that's obviously the full reason, but you know, for the state to fund \$750,000, for this particular building, I have to thank you because you took that on. And so, but let me just read one paragraph and it says, "Merrick's vision of marketing Coral Gables as the Venice of the south included beautifully stenciled wooden Venetian style pillars as markers around the waterways. The original pillars along with the gondolas are long gone. The project to bring back a fully restored Gondola Building land. The Gondola Building is an important historical building that serves as a treasure link to the original vision for the City of Coral Gables as seen through the eyes of the founder, George Merrick. It is representative of the era. Restoring the building to its original use will underscore its relevance within the concept of the Biltmore Hotel's original 1926 visitor guest experience." Now that said, of course, me as a, you know, historic preservation, person...

Mayor Lago: Karelia, if I may. You're running out of time, Karelia.

Ms. Carbonell: I know I am, but anyway, I just want to say, you know, you get the credit.

Mayor Lago: No, you get the credit. Thank you.

Ms. Carbonell: All right. Bye.

Mayor Lago: If I may add something there. So, as was witness before, I had completely forgotten about that conversation. Karelia Carbonell, I have agreed, and I have disagreed with her, but one thing you can't say is that she doesn't stand up for historic preservation. Okay. So, my point is this on that front, this is not a \$750,000 item. This is a -- what's the total number? What's the budget number?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, it's going to be close to \$2 million dollars.

Mayor Lago: Close to \$2 million dollars. So, this is a big, big number. It's a big, big, big number. So, I want to make sure that we do this the right way. We're literally on the cusp and we got to get this done. We got to get this done.

City Clerk Urquia: So next speaker is going to be Mr. Joseph Fadel.

Mayor Lago: Joe, welcome back.

Mr. Fadel: Hey, thank you. Commissioners. Commissioner Anderson mentioned safety golf balls. There is a problem with that right now. An acquaintance of mine, Jeanett Slesnick was hit by a golf ball while walking on North Greenway drive in her father's driveway. You had to be rushed to the hospital and MRI. She had a brace over her neck for months on end. And so anyway, the point I'm trying to make is where, and I'm all in favor of this. But what measures can be taken regarding golfers that are not, you know, don't have good aim because there are many people on the golf course that do not have good aim and that it shouldn't be on the golf course, but can the city do something? Can Public Works? I don't know who would be in charge of the contract working on this restoration or the golf course, people to protect golfers and residents in the vicinity of the work that's going to be done. That's my concern. And I think it's important.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fadel: Jeanett Slesnick was not the first person to be hit by a golf ball, by the way.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. It's something that we've got to work on and it's not within my purview. We'll see if we can get an answer for that one. All right. So, we have a motion and a second with an amendment to draft up a letter to see if we can find a solution. We may have our back against the wall, but at the end of the day we can try. But the main thing here, the main thing here is that it's going to get done. Let me ask you one last question. Mr. Manager, depending on the response of the letter, we give it a few weeks, whatever our state leaders tell us. When do you think we will get this started?

City Manager Iglesias: The plans are very close to finishing. We just need the final location to take care of the site plan issues.

Mayor Lago: The foundation issues and stuff like that, right?

City Manager Iglesias: Foundation. We've done it in such a way that the building can go anywhere. It's a site plan issue now.

Mayor Lago: Is it safe to say maybe January we could start?

City Manager Iglesias: I think so.

Mayor Lago: January, February?

City Manager Iglesias: I think so. January, February.

Mayor Lago: All right. Okay. So, we have a motion and a second. And again, I want to reiterate, thank you to the Historic Board for all their effort and their dedication. Listen, it's a thankless job. Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: I just want to say briefly. I echo the comments made on the dais. This is not an easy, not an easy subject because I truly care about, as does the Mayor and the rest of my colleagues, about the history of the city, especially those aspects of the city that were part of the original vision of George Merrick. So, I want to also recognize the fantastic work done by the Historic Preservation Board. I want to recognize Kelley Schild sitting there as well, all your tireless work, great ideas and great energy. This is a difficult one because I'd love to see the Gondola Building in its original location. And more than that, having gondolas launched, right? That would be wonderful. Especially if they came from Italy, right? That is to say if they weren't actually manufactured here in Coral Gables, which I would prefer even more. However, as much as I'd also like to see the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs deep inside a pyramid in their original location, practicalities don't permit that. And millions and millions of people have seen the tours of the pharaohs as they've gone through the world museums, where they would never have ever been able to do so otherwise. So, there is quite a bit of merit to the point of permitting accessibility when the times and the circumstances have changed since the original building of that structure. Climate is one thing, the Vice Mayor's brought that up, and safety is always paramount to, I'm sure, not only me, but everybody here on the dais. So I am supportive of the Mayor's idea of having a full Commission, signing off on a letter to the folks in Tallahassee, putting forth the bases for why we should relocate it to a place that makes the most sense so that we can provide the most accessibility, safety, and enjoyment for the residents of Coral Gables of this beautiful structure, especially given

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the amount of money that we're going to be investing but we need the support of the state as well. So, I'm supportive of that, Mayor. And hopefully we get this resolved very, very soon, because the sooner we get to enjoy the building, the better for all. So, yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and just two quick points. I think that a water feature would be amazing next door, tastefully done, like a little simple lagoon. You could have some native cypress trees, hammocks, something that would be interesting, something beautiful. Again, I don't think it would ever meet the need or meet the scope of the RFP or the RFQ that was required, but I think it would be a good look. So, I like the Commissioner's comments on that. And I also received notice from Mayor Thomson, who said that she's all on board. She agrees that potentially moving it would be a great idea, that she would be interested in signing on also as a supporter, and that we should reach out to the other Mayors and see if they would like to also show support and be included in that letter. Again, the more the merrier. I think it's great. So, I'm a yes. Thank you. Thank you very much.