

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
November 12, 2024
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL 33134

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, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Assistant City Manager, Joe Gomez

Public Speaker(s)

Douglas Wood, Engineer on Record
Maria Cruz
Peter Iglesias, Former City Manager
Rip Holmes

Agenda Item F-5 [10:15 a.m.]

Discussion regarding City Hall construction and renovations
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Commissioner Fernandez: As a point of order, Mr. Mayor, I'd like to make a motion to call up item F-5.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Item F-5 – to call up agenda item F-5. – Vice Mayor Anderson.

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Mayor Lago: Can I just make a comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Just so the residents understand what's happening. So, as per the Charter, I have very limited powers in the city, one of them is running the meeting. What this gentleman is doing here is forcing my hand to take this next item. Let me explain to you why I requested from the Clerk, because I can't speak to my colleagues via the law here in the city, the Sunshine Law, I can't have a conversation with my colleagues. The individual who is responsible for item F-10 is the issue of the City Hall renovations. I'm still waiting for certain people to be here. I think it would be best, and I ask for this item and the item of the Biltmore to also be heard after around 4 o'clock.

Commissioner Fernandez: I believe that the reason that I'm making this motion is, I believe that residents should know from the beginning of the meeting why we are here today, and what has gone on at City Hall. I believe Mr. Wood is here; is Mr. Wood here? Mr. Wood is here who is our structural engineer, he's ready to answer our questions and as far as the Biltmore, I think we have residents in the room who are here to listen to the item. It was a 10 a.m. time certain, which it was published on Tuesday of last week, it was republished on Thursday of last week, and then you magnanimously decided to change it to 4 p.m. so that residents would show up and not be able to hear the item. So, I do intend...

Mayor Lago: [Inaudible]

Commissioner Fernandez: Let me finish talking. I let you speak. After this item is discussed, I do intend to make a motion to also call up the Biltmore item, as it was originally noticed to be discussed at 10 a.m. and we have residents in the room who are here to give us their opinions and listen to where we are in this situation, which is very concerning to many members of our community. I stand by my motion to call up F-5.

Mayor Lago: So, let me address. Number one, I'm excited to talk about both those issues, I think they are incredibly important, and I stand with the residents in regard to their concerns, that's number one. Number two, I never approved the item to be a time certain 10 o'clock, yes or no, Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: So, Mr. Mayor, we had a 10 a.m. time certain for the Biltmore item, but it is my understanding that certain people couldn't make it until 4 p.m., which is why you wanted to change it, and you wanted to get more speakers. You are correct about City Hall. You wanted to assign 3 p.m., but I know that was not the time that Commissioner Fernandez wanted.

Mayor Lago: So let me explain to you very clearly what Commissioner Fernandez will not tell you. I would like to speak about the issue with the Biltmore, but also have the individual who has the lease for the Biltmore here with the party, Mr. Prescott. Mr. Tom Prescott sent notice to my

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colleagues. I can't speak to my colleagues. I can't have a conversation with them due to the Sunshine Law. I said, let's have a meeting at 4 o'clock so Mr. Tom Prescott can be here, and bring his team members here. I told Mr. Prescott when he called me, Vince, can we do it at 4 o'clock. I said, I don't have a problem with it, but there are certain members of the Commission that wanted to do a 10 o'clock. I spoke to the Clerk to have this conversation. In any other Commission, in ten years before this Commission, reasonableness would prevail, not stubbornness. Mr. Prescott told the Clerk, I cannot be there till 4 o'clock, because certain members, for example, his interior designer, architect, and other members of the team cannot be there. We are about to have a conversation when we don't have the other side of the story, whether you agree with it or you don't agree with it. Now, let's get onto the issue of City Hall. I am 100 percent in favor of having the conversation. We can have the conversation whenever you like, but I was hoping to have an expert here who can have a conversation also – I was hoping to have an expert here, outside of Mr. Wood, who have the utmost respect and confidence in, and I've worked on projects where he's been involved in. He's a consummate gentleman and one of probably the brightest individuals when it comes to structural engineering in South Florida and the State of Florida, but I also wanted to have somebody else who could give us a little bit further guidance in regard to the way things transpired. That's the only reason why I bring it up right now. If you want to do it right now, not a problem. If you want to have the Biltmore right now, it's perfectly fine, but you are not going to be able to have the other side of the story and you are not going to be able to talk to Mr. Prescott head-on and ask why certain things were done, and I think that's what we want to have a conversation in the light, in regards to why things transpired the way they transpired in the Biltmore, my only point.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor, that was a decision that Mr. Prescott made. Mr. Prescott was informed the minute that this time certain was secured, prior to publishing the agenda by myself, that we had a 10 a.m. time certain. I spoke to him about it last night and you know, apparently, he needed more time to be prepared for the meeting. This has been going on for two weeks. There shouldn't be any more need for preparation. We should not continue to push things off. We have people here who are here to listen to this discussion item, if Mr. Prescott chose not to be here at 10 a.m., that was his decision, but I think we owe it to our residents who are the ones we represent and the interest of our residents, to discuss the item while they are here in the room, not when they are at home trying to figure out what time it will actually be taken up. So, I stand by my motion for F-5.

Mayor Lago: So, I'm going to respond to you, because I know the picture you're painting which will come out tomorrow on all the blogs – the Mayor doesn't care about the Biltmore, the Mayor doesn't care about City Hall. When you are a professional, you'd like to hear both sides of the issue. You'd like to have the person under oath in front of you and having conversations and negotiations with that person. What I would never have done, what I would never have done under any circumstances is sent out an email to 35,000 residents when we haven't even had a walk-

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through yet, we hadn't known what was going on. What I did, what I did was, detailed in this email right here, which is very clear in this email, and the Vice Mayor was also copied in the email, we cannot have these conversations except for in this moment is, this email was sent to myself, it was sent to the Vice Mayor, the Miami Herald was copied on it, Anna Pernas, Juan Riesco, Andres Laducci, Don Slesnick was copied on it, my colleagues were not copied on it, only the Vice Mayor. What did I do? I immediately forwarded that email to my Deputy City Manager, and I said, Mr. Deputy City Manager, please review, this is an issue that I think it needs attention immediately. I work through staff. I want staff to review things. I want people to digest things. I want to understand. I don't go off and send an email to 35,000 residents saying, shocking news, like this is like some tabloid and basically state that the Biltmore is falling down, and they are doing something. Did the Biltmore do something without a permit? – wholeheartedly. Was it incorrect? – extremely incorrect, especially when you read the lease agreement, which I have read the lease agreements, and I have also reviewed which my colleagues have not, the Local Designation Report, the State Designation Report, the National Historic Landmark Report, and also the National Registry of Historic Places. I have every single document here. I reviewed it, and then myself and Commissioner Fernandez went on the walk-through three days later. You want to reserve judgement. You want to hear both sides of the story what transpired. This is a sensitive topic, and I'll give you an example, I'll give you an example. When we had an issue months ago, excuse me, years ago, with the Coral Gables Country Club, you remember that about three years ago, we had an issue with that, that was done during a different administration. We sat down, we had a conversation with the leaseholder, we did an exploratory dive into the issue with our very competent staff who's here, and we reviewed the issue. We did not go public in regard to our findings, in regard to the neglect that happened in that property. We did not throw anybody else under the bus. We addressed the issue and resolved the issue. That is the way that you conduct business appropriately. You do not send out an email that says, shocking and this is not about getting the information out first. This is about getting the information out correctly. So, what I would have done is, I would sit down and have a conversation with the leaseholder, who has another 60 years in the lease, I would not have put that individual in default, okay. That's the way you do things, and in regard to the City Manager, the same thing. We can go into this issue in very clear detail, because I'm going to ask Mr. Douglas Woods some serious conversations, because while everybody was on vacation yesterday, I was at City Hall reviewing the existing conditions. I was at City Hall with engineers, with the people who are working on the construction project, addressing the situation. So, I've done my due diligence, but I think it's fair to listen to both sides before we render a decision.

Commissioner Castro: Mr. Clerk there's a motion and a second on the table. I think we need to call for a vote.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm going to add to this, so the record is complete. I also received the email from the resident with videos and photos about the changes that were done in the lobby and

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other areas of the Biltmore Hotel. I immediately forwarded it to staff and asked them to examine and respond to us. I also asked our City Manager and our City Attorney to put this item on the agenda to give this Commission an update. The response is our city staff is not ready because we don't have the report complete. Until we have a complete report to where we can have a concrete discussion, on what the next steps should be taken, who should be appointed to help with the restoration efforts and the various things that we should do, because there is the potential of litigation, being a practicing attorney, I don't think it's wise or prudent to have an airing of laundry before you take those next steps. You need to have the report from our staff. You need it from our Historic Department in order to be able to make an intelligent decision. We owe that to the residents and the report can be shared with the residents, because it's a public document. They need to know the facts, okay. We're all upset about the Biltmore and what happened with the Biltmore, but there is a process and a procedure that should be followed and if it wasn't ready enough for the City Manager to put on this agenda, or for the City Attorney to put on the agenda, then it's not ready.

Commissioner Castro: The item in question right now is City Hall. Clerk, please call the vote.

City Clerk Urquia: This would be to move up the item F-5 for discussion right now – Vice Mayor Anderson.

City Attorney Suarez: F-5 is discussion regarding City Hall.

City Clerk Urquia: City Hall.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It wasn't noticed on a time certain – no.

City Clerk Urquia: That is correct.

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: No

(Vote: 3-2)

Vice Mayor Anderson: And by the way, there are other items on this agenda that are time certain, we have a very tight schedule today, and it's a disservice to the community and people have appeared for those items, to be shuffling things around and having more items heard before they can have an opportunity to speak.

Commissioner Fernandez: Madam Vice Mayor, that seems to happen every single meeting when it's one of your items or the Mayor's items. In fact, two meetings ago, we had a pocket item that wasn't even on the agenda, brought up during what we had for a time certain, and the time certain was pushed back for a pocket item. So, you can't have it both ways.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, why don't you refresh me and the community here what the pocket item was.

Commissioner Fernandez: It really doesn't matter. You can't say we shouldn't move items up prior to a time certain, if a time certain wasn't given, but then be okay with another one being called up.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I'd like to call up.

Mayor Lago: But Commissioner, hold on a second, hold on. Listen, you made a statement, I don't remember what it was, there are so many items that happen here, with so many meetings. What was the pocket item, obviously that I brought up that was so important that you just mentioned it. Do you know what it was?

Commissioner Fernandez: It's not relevant to the question. The Vice Mayor says – the Vice Mayor is the one who is saying, we should not be calling items up if they are not time certain.

Mayor Lago: But Commissioner, if it wasn't relevant then why did you bring it up.

Commissioner Castro: I think we need to stop playing games and move on. The motion passed.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Wood, I appreciate you being here. For those residents here, August 27th, I brought up the item on the structural issues we are having at City Hall. It was something that was brought to my attention a few days before. Apparently, the city had been informed in 2011 about this issue. Actions were not taken back then. City was once again informed by Mr. Wood in 2022 and 2023, and as a member of the Commission, I was never informed by the prior administration of these structural issues at City Hall. So, I'm grateful to the Manager and the Deputy City Manager that they brought it to my attention. We've been able to take a proactive approach to try to protect our historic asset that is City Hall. Actions have been taken in the past with the roof renovations. I know the windows have been a work in progress. When I was first elected, for the first two months I was having issues being at City Hall, and we quickly found out it was because we had mold issues in my office in particular, and we had to take immediate action. Public Works was able to come in and make some changes in order to deal with some of the humidity and moisture issues that we have, and that's due to the material that was used to build City Hall. Now, Mr. Wood and I met when he was doing a walk-through and we were actually – I was trying to help him find a specific column that they couldn't find, because it seemed to be in a

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closet, the picture showed it was in a closet, and we couldn't find that closet. Eventually, they figured out it was in the elevator shaft, but since that day, a lot has changed. That first report said there were two beams that were deficient. The one that was located between the City Manager and the City Clerk and the Commission Chamber. The second one was outside the Chamber. Since then, we found out there is one above the first-floor conference room and under the City Attorney's office, which has put us in this situation today. Last week Mr. Wood reached out to our City Manager and to staff and informed them that due to the ground penetrating radar that was used in City Hall, they were forced to move us from City Hall to the location where we are today. So, Mr. Wood, I just wanted to hear from you what your findings are and what has brought us to this situation.

Mr. Wood: Okay. First of all, good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. So, we are in the process of the recertification. We did that report approximately two years ago, and it's been under consideration since then and how we proceed. I mean, obviously it was an occupied building, fully finished, so it took some time to develop that, but we are now working on that. Of course, we are working on parts of the building on the third floor and the first floor, which gave us the opportunity...

Commissioner Castro: Excuse me, talk a little closer to the microphone, please.

Mr. Wood: Sorry. Is that better.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir. Thank you.

Mr. Wood: So, you are working on parts of the building on the third floor and the first floor, and that gave us an opportunity to make some more observations, and while we're doing that, just developing some more information. You mentioned the GPR, we were able to – so for instance, you are talking about the column outside the Chamber, it's a stone column. The original drawings for the building show it as a reenforced concrete column, but as we started to look at it, I mean obviously, its stone. I've run into that before at Vizcaya where we had like an annular ring of stone and then reenforced concrete in the middle. So, we decided to do a little more investigation right there on the spot. Some of the staff members took a drill bit and we drilled all the way through to the center, couldn't find any different material. So, then we decided to move on to the GPR, which confirmed that there is no reenforcing in there, so those columns are just solid stone. There are some dowels that connect the pieces together, but that's it. So, with the large piece of stone that was coming lose on that particular column, we decided that we should proceed right away with shoring that column.

Commissioner Fernandez: So as far as the work that needs to be done immediately at City Hall, what do you foresee the first steps have to be?

Mr. Wood: Well, we identified four places that we think should be shored. I believe two of them are already shored or really close. The other one, the stone column, I think is starting today for that, and then we're still working with the shoring engineer on the last column. And it's necessary so that when we begin to further investigate these conditions, we have reliable stability so that we can start chipping away at the column and things like that.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think the Assistant City Manager is heading up the project, would you mind coming up, Mr. Gomez. Could you please refresh our memories on the work that has been done over the last couple of months and what is currently undergoing and moving forward.

Assistant City Manager Gomez: Yes Commissioner. Thank you and good morning, Joe Gomez, Assistant City Manager. So, currently, the work that's been ongoing is part of the report that identified issues that needed to be repaired for purposes of the recertification. In addition to that, the structural work that Doug alluded to is currently underway as well. So, he mentioned, we are currently in the process of installing between today and tomorrow the shoring for the outside, which is right underneath the Commission Chambers, as well as the shoring inside where the City Manager's office is. That wall has already been taken down, as well as the area where CIP office was located, as well. Additional shoring that's going to be put in place, one is in the City Attorney's office, as well as the large one that's going to be placed where the conference room on the first floor is, and that's going to go all the way up to the top, which will include having needle piles that will basically hold that shoring in place.

Commissioner Fernandez: Timeframe-wise, what are we looking at?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: Well, the two columns that are being shored right now, that shoring should all be complete by the end of tomorrow, the other shoring is still being reviewed by Doug, at this time for the calculation and all that, that shoring will be installed. One of them, obviously the one where the conference room is, which goes all the way up to the Commission offices, that one can't be installed because we have to actually penetrate into, to be able to support the shoring, until the Commission offices are vacated. We're working right now on trying, we are looking at a plan to relocate the Commission offices to the Minorca Garage here in an empty space where we have a layout, looking at that and other things that we are currently investigating, including office space as well to do that, but we can't – we won't be able to do that until we actually relocate all of you out of those offices.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a quick question, two questions. In the communications that went out, I think Joe, you sent it out, why were we instructed to, it appeared to vacate the Chambers immediately, why are we not in the Chambers today?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: Doug is the expert, but in a nutshell, we received correspondence from Doug after his review of both the condition of the column, as well as the ground penetrating

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radar studies that were done that he felt that that particular column was, what we call has more bending than it really should, so to err on the side of caution, it was better not to be able to load the Commission Chambers, therefore remove the load by not having the Commission meetings there.

Commissioner Menendez: And I heard that, I don't know if its accurate or not, that the floor was perhaps in the Chambers not, was inclined or over time had, something having to do with the flooring which added more possible destabilization.

Assistant City Manager Gomez: I'm not aware of that, Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay. Good. I just wanted to make sure, to clarify. Thank you.

City Manager Rojas: One of the ideas is, if I may, is again, err on the side of caution. There are two issues; structural issues that they are dealing with, the experts are dealing with, and then you have the environmental issue. As they are doing their work inside City Hall, you have the dust, you have all those issues, environmental issues that develop. Our idea is to try to locate a facility where we can house all the offices that currently exist in City Hall, in one particular place so the residents can go to one location and they have the Mayor's office, Vice Mayor's office, the City Attorney's office, my office and so on. So, we're in the process of doing that. It takes some time. We're looking at maybe January, towards the end of January, hopefully by February to be able to relocate so that the work can be done at City Hall, whatever needs to be done, from the engineering perspective.

Commissioner Menendez: Regarding your answer to the question in terms of why we're here today. What triggered it? – is there like a new test that was done or something that was already in the report that perhaps triggered us vacating the Chambers.

Mr. Wood: Yes. So, the most critical issue is that stone column. Its outside the Commission Chamber, but the roof above is supported on those columns. The investigation that we just started looking at more closely at these columns with the GPR, that was just like a week ago, and that's when we determined that the drawings are not correct, that the columns are just solid stone, it is compromised with a large loose piece of stone on that column. So, in erring on the side of caution, we decided again, to recommend that that gets shored up immediately and I was asked if the building should be occupied, at least in the Commission Chamber area, and I said, to be prudent, I would wait at least until the shoring is in place.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you for making that call on behalf of everybody. Appreciate it greatly.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Mr. ACM, regarding the windows, has the sample window arrived so we can start that process?

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Assistant City Manager Gomez: I'm happy to report it has arrived. It's being assembled at the Board of Architects conference room, the mockup window, so it will take a couple of days to be able to put it together and then it will be available for viewing and so forth.

Mayor Lago: Anything else. Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: No, thank you.

Mayor Lago: So, I have a few issues, if I may. Mr. Wood, would you please come forward. Mr. Clerk, would you put the pictures up, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Just to give you a quick background. My background is in finance and engineering, and I also have a Masters in Construction Management. I build high-rise buildings, I restore historical buildings, this is what I do for a living for the last 22 years. I do this every single day. I work with people like Doug Wood. I work with Doug Wood many, many times, plans, I know exactly how this works, okay. These are my pictures. I took these pictures yesterday. This is a simple walk-through. This building is over-reinforced, okay. If you look at the beams, as you can see right there, they are crisp, they are clean, they look like they were done yesterday. If you look at the sprawling, there barely is any sprawling, barely any sprawling, and the reason why you have a little bit of sprawling is because of the way when the beams were poured, the rebar fell probably to one side, as a result, and it was too close to the edge. Stop right here. What you see here right now was an area that was stated to be hollow by the GPR. It's not hollow. I was there when the structural sub-contractor was digging. It's a six-inch slab and the rebar is crisp, not a section of rot, not a section of rust, and underneath that there is compacted matter underneath that. Lime rock, it's there. So, there is no hollow area under the slab that is a slab that they were using a chippy hammer, a drill bit to get through, and I witnessed it as they were breaking through it and it was stronger than today's construction, okay. I have a very simple question for you. I'm all in favor of the shoring. I've been involved in shoring in many projects. I was involved in shoring at a major project in University of Miami, in the medical campus at Jackson, where the building was structurally unsound and it had to be basically shored for six months while people were inside, while the plans were redone to meet the needs in regards to the structure issues that we encountered just like we encountered in the new permitting building, which as many of you are aware, when we started removing the drywall, we noticed there were structural issues with the building that were not included in the budget. That happened. What did we do? We had to take a step back, redesign the building, bring the structural engineers in, that took time, figure out what the loads were going to be, correct the structural integrity of the building, and then restart the construction. This is not the case.

Mr. Wood: And we were the structural engineers for that project.

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Mayor Lago: So, am I right or wrong? – am I right or am I wrong?

Mr. Wood: About what?

Mayor Lago: About the fact that when we removed the demolition, when we started the demolition process, we encountered structural issues in the building.

Mr. Wood: Well, there are always some surprises when you do those demolitions.

Mayor Lago: I'm just telling you, but it's not your fault. It's the fact that they were behind the drywall, and we had to make those corrections. So, my point is this, this is nothing new. Shoring is a technique that goes back to Greek times, Roman times, this is nothing new. This has been happening for years. Once the building is shored, is the building habitable, yes or no.

Mr. Wood: In our opinion, when the shoring is installed and approved, the building is stable and yes, you can rely on the safety code.

Mayor Lago: Now that's number one. So, we got that out of the way. We do not need to leave City Hall. What you're seeing here is the theater of politics, of we have an issue with an email that was sent out, another email just at the Biltmore, that this has been going on since 2011. I've been here for twelve years; employees have done an amazing job in the city. Would you like to know why the city did not remodel City Hall? It's very simple, because the Commission, prior to this Commission, which Commissioner Menendez was on, and so was the Vice Mayor, decided to take money and use it for Phillips Park, that's what we did. The budget is there. We had money in City Hall and now we have to, there are different options in regard to how to address the issue. This has not been abandoned, this project has not been abandoned. This is a very complex project. This is a historically significant building where they have been working on it for a long time. If we abandon this building right now, we will not come back to this building probably for four years, and I'm going to tell you why. The staff over the last nine months has done no RFQs, Request for Qualifications for architects or professionals, they have not hired an architect, that takes another three months. Then you've got to go out for an RFQ for a contractor. You've got to bid the project. You've got to get these plans permitted and then you've got to select through Procurement your general contractor, that takes at a minimum two years to do all that work before you can start construction. So, this is simple. The shoring has been done in many different buildings. Let me remind you. The Biltmore Hotel had shoring up for years while plans were being done. The Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, Mr. ACM, I would like for Mr. Wood to hear this. For the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, as you are aware, Mr. Engineer on Record, had shoring up for years and I'm going to give you the one that had the most shoring up, that got the most talk, which is the downtown courthouse, had shoring up for nine years before the construction commenced and people were using the building in and out, it wasn't an issue. Shoring is not an inhibitor to being able to being inside the building. You can work around the shoring. In an election year, in a

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moment where people need to use City Hall, there is no reason to get rid of the entire Commission floor, there is no reason to move the City Attorney, there is no reason to move the City Clerk, there is no reason to move the City Manager's office. This is something that we've done for years. I've worked around shoring for years. Yes, it's a little uncomfortable at certain times, but you isolate those areas, and you move on. The building is safe. This building is safe. And multiple engineers that I've spoken to have told me, even if the building was not shored, it would be safe, because it's not a catastrophe and I've done my homework on that issue. So, shoring is in place, it took two days to put the shoring in. It will probably take another three or four days to do the pending shoring that's there, clean up the area, and we can start working on the building. We have a lot of work to do before we can even consider construction. Construction is two years away from here. This is what I do every single day for a living, so I understand where we are in the process. No one's going to see me a story and tell me that we have to vacate the building right now or we are going to be in a catastrophe. That's neither the case. I will continue to have office hours there on Friday. I will continue to meet residents; employees should use that building. It's a safe building. We don't need to scare people in this community. It's a perfectly fine building. The building is beautiful. We changed the roof, before you do anything else, the next step you do is you change the windows. So, in my opinion, and I'd love to hear from professionals that are here who have a lot more knowledge than I do. I'd like to hear their opinion on that matter. I think it's important to hear from the public, people are here, they'd like to speak about it. This building doesn't belong to me, it doesn't belong to this Commission, it belongs to everyone in this community, but we shouldn't use scare tactics for political favors or for political wins.

City Manager Rojas: If I may, Mayor, may I. That's fine, like I said before, the engineering studies, whatever those results are, it's what they are. In short, I have to look at the environmental factors of working in a building where they are taking off the roof, some folks are allergic to mold, to dust and so on. So, the question is, for staff is, do you want to work in a building, let's say it's safe, whatever the engineer says, do you want to work in a building that's going to be under construction, roof material is going to be moved around while you are working there every day, that's the question.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to answer you. I'm going to answer you. First off, do you know what a negative air pressure machine is?

City Manager Rojas: Yes sir, I do actually.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Then you should be aware. Negative air pressure machines can be used. They use them in hospital scenarios all the time and you are well versed on it. So, you can use negative air – I listened to you. Let me finish. So, you can use negative air pressure machines here to clean and scrub the air. It would be cleaner. It would be cleaner than the previous, that's number one. Number two, there should be minimal work on the roof, minimal roof, because the roof has been

replaced. It's been taken care of. If there are any penetrations on the roof that need to be done, its minimal at best. What needs to happen here is, and I wholeheartedly agree, we need to move out of the building once we are ready to start real demolition and real construction. You don't even have plans yet. You don't even have engineering drawings done. You haven't even selected an architect. You haven't even gone to market to select an architect. So, I would love to see the RFQ if you've gone to market to select an architect. When did you do that? When was it?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: That RFQ was advertised, I believe, Celeste is here, July or August of this year.

Mayor Lago: Did you select an architect?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: The selection committee, I believe met last week and they are coming to award to the December Commission meeting.

Mayor Lago: Obviously, I would love to have this information, but since the Manager won't meet with me, I don't have that information. Quick question. You're an expert. How long does it take an architect and an engineer and a civil engineer to finish plans of this magnitude that are ready to go to permit and to be bid, how long?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: Nine months to a year.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we're not even talking about breaking ground or doing anything – nine months to a year. So, you have a year, then you've got to permit the plans, then you've got to select the contractor, then you've got to bid the work, and then you've got to start the process. So why would you vacate a building now, outside of political theater, when you don't need to vacate that building. Clean the building. You're not going to be doing an interior work, clean the building, and in two years you start the work. That's what you do. So, get yourself some negative air pressure machines, and allow the people who own the building to use the building, because all the residents that I've talked to said, this building needs to be beautified, needs to be historically preserved, and I agree. The moment that we start construction, everybody out, and that gives you the time, as you even said right now. I haven't even found a location to put the Mayor, the Commissioners, the Vice Mayor, where we are putting the Clerk, where we are putting the City Attorney's office. So do things right and diligently, don't just start rushing to close City Hall to make a statement, which I think again, is not in-kind with the city.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Speak through me. Speak through the Chair. You'd like to speak Mr. Manager.

City Manager Rojas: Yes, very simple. I am not going to put city employees back in that building unless the environmental conditions are met where its safe for them to work period, unless – I

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haven't finished Mayor. Unless this Commission directs me to do so, I will not put them back to work there. If you want to work there, that's fine. My suggestion would be, let's take care, make sure that we have no environmental issues while they are doing all of the shoring and – I haven't finished.

Mayor Lago: Explain it. What are the environmental issues?

City Manager Rojas: I haven't finished. The pollen, the dust. You were in my office, I assume, because you took pictures, you walked around.

Mayor Lago: I haven't been in your office.

City Manager Rojas: You think that's an area that somebody can really work and not have issues breathing. There are some members of this Commission that are very sensitive to those issues. The bottom-line is this, Mayor, I am not putting a city employee back to work there until I am comfortable that there are no environmental issues for our employees unless this Commission directs me to do so.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager. Mr. Manager, first off, employees already have two days off, they don't go to City Hall. They already work – its unprecedented, we have employees that now are working from home for two days out of the week already.

City Manager Rojas: Is that a negative?

Mayor Lago: I don't agree with that. I think that people should go to work at the office, and I think it should be working, and I've heard from many, many, many residents who tell me, that employees should be going back. In the private sector, people are going back to work, that is a positive. You may disagree, but at the end of the day...

City Manager Rojas: I totally disagree.

Mayor Lago: That's perfectly fine. I think people should be working from the office.

Commissioner Fernandez: Your office is closed most days of the week.

Mayor Lago: It's not closed.

Commissioner Fernandez: There's nobody there.

Mayor Lago: Again, Commissioner, we're not going to go back and forth. My bottom-line is simple, and that is, the environmental concerns can be easily addressed by negative air pressure machines, can be addressed by circulation, it's all done every single day. We are not reinventing the wheel; these are simple things. Shutting down City Hall is not the appropriate thing to do. I want to continue being at City Hall. I want to continue to offer open office hours, because for the

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next two years there will be no construction at City Hall. Once the shoring is done, you have to move unto the next step in the pre-construction process, and there will be no pollen or dust, maybe on a Saturday, maybe on a Sunday they do some exploratory work on a wall. You know what you do, you use plastic, you seal the area off, use a negative air pressure machine, like we do in medical facilities, and you contain the dust. You don't just allow the dust to go throughout the entire building, that's what everybody does. We are not reinventing the wheel. So, to say that environmental effects are a very broad statement to scare people, and you are dealing with someone who does this every day. So, this is my expertise. If you want to talk about security and you want to talk about dealing with policing, and those kinds of tactics, I leave it up to you, I leave it up to the Chief. But when it talks about construction, when you talk about engineering, when you talk about issues of building buildings, restoring buildings, I've done historic buildings, you are not going to tell me that going to City Hall, like I was there this morning at 7:15 in the morning, is a hazard to my health when it's not. If you tell me that there's asbestos, it's a different situation. We control the asbestos, we bring in a company, we remediate it, and we take it out. To my knowledge, there isn't any asbestos in the flooring, there isn't any asbestos in the mastic, in regard to the bonding agent or for the HVAC, this is what I do for a living. Again, you're not going to tell me that the City Hall can't be used for two years when it can obviously be used.

City Manager Rojas: I'm just saying that I'm not putting city employees back in there.

Mayor Lago: Neither am I.

City Manager Rojas: Hundred percent convinced that that is safe.

Mayor Lago: I'm not putting anybody – I'm not putting anybody, again, that's the tactic for the blogs, Political Cortadito, the Gables Insider – the Mayor puts employees at risk. That's not what I said, and I'm going to be very clear, because that's what you're going to say.

Commissioner Castro: The highest level...

Mayor Lago: Excuse me, excuse me. That is exactly what I'm not going to accept, because that's the tactic. So, what we're going to do is very simple. When the building is shored, if the will of the Commission, when the building is shored, you take the necessary steps to make sure that the air quality is appropriate, and the employees that want to work, work there. If they don't want to work there, they don't have to work there. At the end of the day, they are already working two days a week from home, that's my opinion, that's what I would do. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Chair. I'm going to first address some of the environmental issues. Many buildings have been repaired, construction done, the federal building downtown, which had asbestos in it, had a particular floor shut down while work was done. We have had work done in City Hall, you put up the plastic in and guard for the air quality going in, and we could have had more filtration machines. I have one in my house. It goes off when there is dust and

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pollen in the air. Pollen usually is not a concern during construction, you are dealing with dust, not pollen, because there are not trees or flowers emitting dust or pollen in the building itself, so that's not an issue. When I first got in office, my first priority was to seal off the water in the buildings and that was why the reroofing I pushed for hard, to get done on City Hall was done. We have to seal the exterior first to prevent any more water damage. The next step was the windows. As you can see, it has taken an enormous amount of time to be able to get a mock-up window this past year. We finally are going to have one that we can look at and start the process of reviewing the window itself and determine whether this Commission wants to proceed with that design. That money was originally in the Phillips Park, and I drafted a resolution to move the money into City Hall so that we can prioritize getting this building sealed from the outside to prevent further water damage in the future. I've been around shoring before too. For over a decade ago, 73 West Flagler, which is the courthouse, it's about a 13-story building, not a three-story building, but a 13-story building. You could look down into the garage when the cars parked and see the shoring that was in that courthouse. It was amazing. Okay. Business didn't stop, cars didn't stop going in there, and people proceeded moving forward getting to work done in that very historic courthouse that's on 73 West Flagler. I told you all too that I had to take my husband down to Bascome Palmer. In the parking garage had cars parked in it, with fully operational with shoring in it, the complete period of time that I was there, and people were going through. Hundreds of shoring poles were in that parking garage, and I would estimate that a car weighs a lot more than the people that go into City Hall. The amount of traffic that goes to Bascome Palmer is phenomenal and it is again, is more than a three-story building. We are talking about 7-8 stories of parking with shoring poles in there. The fact that we need to put shoring poles in City Hall is not alarming to me at all. We do it when we jack cars up; you use a jack to put it up and you put jack stands underneath so that while you are working on it you don't have the car going down on a person, the individual that's underneath the vehicle. We can put air sensors in there and when the air is clear, after any dust is made, we can reoccupy the building. I don't see a need to vacate the building while we have an architectural and engineering drawings done and after the shoring poles installed. It's a simple process, and I think we are just costing the city an enormous amount of money to rent space elsewhere for a building that's completely occupiable once the shoring poles are placed in there. Its open today. It's no shock and awe to me that the building needed work. It's been in the budget for a very long period of time. Testing had been going on with the materials in that building for a very long period of time, so that we could have a proper plan moving forward, and I think you have to move forward in a prudent manner with testing. We're worried about dust. When the work is done, the dust is cleaned up. You can go in and you can have air quality sensors put in there to make sure that its clear. We do it every day when we tent homes. We fumigate homes. We open up the windows. That's a poison that's put in the windows and its regularly accepted in a community that you can fumigate a home for termites and reoccupy it within 24 hours after the windows are open. We can do this at City Hall.

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Mayor Lago: Another point that I forgot to mention, and I apologize was, this building is already basically unoccupied. The entire third floor doesn't have one individual working on it, except for you Gus, you're not forgotten my friend, you're not forgotten. So, we went from having probably 50 people on the third floor to having one or two people working on the third floor, and correct me if I'm wrong, please, we used to have dozens and dozens and dozens of file cabinets that were a significant load, Mr. Wood, on the third floor, those no long exist, those are gone. So, we're removed significant of the live load and of the dead load of the third floor. The second floor, again, is almost similar in regard to the amount of load there, so it's pretty easy to detect that City Hall is in a much better position in regards to the structural integrity today as of the two shoring, but I have even spoken to engineers who told me, Vince, even the shoring that's in place, with all due respect to Mr. Wood, is a precautionary measure, the building is not going to fall. The building is perfectly fine. Let's address that issue, let's address that issue like we did with the slab where we found that it was actually reenforced and that it wasn't hollow yesterday, but this building is not going anywhere. It was built well, and it is an asset in this community that we will protect, but we want to do it the right way.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: Mr. Wood, I'm sorry for putting you through this environment. I respect your intelligence, your professionalism, your expertise and judgement. Now, the biggest concern in question right now is the safety of our residents and our employees. If the Chamber is occupied what would be the worst-case scenario of what can happen there?

Mayor Lago: You want to ask Mr. Wood?

Commissioner Castro: That's what I'm asking him.

Mayor Lago: I don't think he knew, so I was asking, just want to make sure you are speaking with him.

Mr. Wood: So, you are asking me to speculate on issues that we really can't. We're being cautious and to me the most significant issue is that stone column outside, and again, I think after we get that shored, it will be safe.

Commissioner Castro: Can you paint me a picture, so maybe the people that don't understand the construction phase could maybe understand. For us, safety is number one. So, if we need to evacuate or leave the premises, we will do it just if there's one percentage that the floor can come down and that people can die, or whatever the case is. What is the worst-case scenario. Paint me a picture.

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Mr. Wood: So, the primary issue at the floor level as parameter beams, which would have been probably exposed to moisture penetration over the years, there's been some deterioration. There's a couple of them that were more deteriorated than the others, those are the ones that are getting shored now, but again, when its shored it will be stable and safe.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Wood, may I ask you a question, I think will help Commissioner Castro. Very simple, yes or no answer. The building is shored in three days, in your expert opinion, as a licensed engineer, engineer on record, is there any risk once that is shored that you could have a catastrophe there and people's lives are at risk, yes or no.

Mr. Wood: In our opinion, it will be stable and confident that it will perform properly and be safe to occupy.

Mayor Lago: Safe to occupy, okay. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may, through the Chair.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

Commissioner Menendez: I have to apologize, because after you spoke at the podium, I think we spent the next 30 minutes, the word politicize, and for your report and your concern for the safety of others, to have the word politicize be in any way connected to what your job is, I apologize for that. I too apologize for the employees of the City of Coral Gables, because as city leaders and the administration, our responsibility is number one, the safety and well-being of our residents and of our employees. Our residents look to us for leadership and our employees and residents, they all look to us, and we have to make the difficult decisions, and life-safety is the number one issue in our community and anywhere around the country. So, they throw out, some folks like to throw out, well funding went here, funding went there. We spent the last three years talking about \$63 million dollars for a mobility hub, okay. I'm not here to point fingers, here to find solutions and a path forward. I think common sense and the most prudent thing is to make sure that our employees, our residents and everyone involved is safe. If there is an elected official up here that wants to stay in their office, I'll be more than happy to make a motion maybe get a second that they can stay in their office, but for the well-being of everyone involved, I think we need to do the right thing and not politicize it at all.

Mayor Lago: So, I'd like to respond to Commissioner Menendez. Number one, when I mentioned politicize it, I was under no means mentioning you and you know that very well that I was not. What I was mentioning was my colleagues on the Commission and very clearly, and you know that Mr. Wood. You and I have worked before together, that's number one. Number two, the statement of the mobility hub was mentioned. Just to be clear, we were going to bond the mobility hub, so it was not an issue of money that was coming from the General Fund that was going to be worked out on that front. Okay. It was different ways that it was going to be applied to, and that

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was in consideration, we were talking about it. The money has always been in the budget. We took the money, and we spent it on a park, which I wholeheartedly think it's a great idea. Do I think it was an opportunity to come to consensus here on the Commission when we did not support Commissioner Menendez \$140 million dollar bond referendum, which would have, in my opinion, put the city even in more debt. So, what did we do, we came to consensus, and we said, let's build a park that I think would be very beneficial. I recommend everyone look that meeting up so you can get an idea of how the park came to fruition. Now, like I mentioned before, the Mayor doesn't care about safety, that's going to be tomorrow's headline, it will be a Javier Banos special and Gables Insider, it will be a special on Political Cortadito. That again is misleading, completely and utterly inappropriate, completely and utterly inappropriate. The issue here is very simple. When I say politicizing, there's an election coming, and the effort is to say, look what a disaster the city is, it's all under the watchful eye of the Mayor. We can't use City Hall, but you can use City Hall. Look at the Biltmore, look what happened at the Biltmore, it happened under the watchful eye of the Mayor. Look what's going on here. All that is the intent and that is what everybody is talking about, but what I will not allow as a professional, as a person who does this for a living, okay. I go to work every day; this is what I do every single day. I will not allow somebody to say something that professionally is incorrect. When you sit down in a room and you say, is this building safe, it is safe. You shouldn't scare residents; you shouldn't scare people coming to do business in the city. It's safe. If you don't want to be in City Hall, that's perfectly fine. You don't have to be in City Hall. I'm not forcing you to be in City Hall, but City Hall should be open for an election. The Clerk's office should be in City Hall. The City Attorney's office should be in City Hall, and as we move forward over the next, like our ACM just said, Mr. Gomez, over the next year when we design this building, and we get public input, and we get the public involved on every single front, we should then vacate the building when we are ready to commence construction, which I believe that the bidding process, the permitting process will be six months to nine months on top of the nine months to one year that the design process will take. So, we will not be breaking ground and starting this project for a minimum for two years and we haven't even talked about funding which we're talking about two different options, either the bond or we're talking about finding money in the coffers through budgeting. I'd like to hear, Mr. Clerk, from the community, if possible, who's been waiting so quietly and peacefully. Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: I had a few additional comments, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We'll have them after we hear from the residents.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker, Mr. Mayor, is Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: I said I will be back, and it wouldn't be good. Maria Cruz, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I see several problems, several issues here. We have, let's see how I can say it nicely, we have a mayor that is very angry, upset, what other nice thing can I say, because he has lost

control of the City Commission. Our Charter does not provide for a strong mayor. Our Charter provides for five elected officials that make decisions. The problem we have is that under previous administration, one because the one before kept him out of the loop, but then we had one that allowed him to make decisions and tell people what to do even though that was not his job, and this is what where politics comes in. We talk about politics; the others are politicizing. No, the mayor is politicizing because guess what, any issue, any item, any concern that he thinks is important, the residents get an alert, its important, we need to discuss. Guess what, some of those things could have been discussed here, but we chose to alert the residents to get them all excited. We also have a mayor that even though transparency is a word that he used all the time, now does not want the residents to know that there's a problem with the building. We shouldn't be discussing it publicly. You know what, let's keep it inhouse, because the residents do not have to know because the experts – the person who has a construction management degree knows more than the engineer that we pay as a consultant to tell us what the problem is, and we're going to challenge that. Well, we had an engineer that didn't think it was important to take care of City Hall. Previously when it was brought up, of course nobody knew about it, we kept it away from the residents and some of the elected officials and guess what, I think, if I remember correctly, remember I'm old and sometimes I forget, the money from City Hall did not go to a park. The money from City Hall was changed, channeled differently when we made City Hall a City Hall Complex, so we could fix 427, that was the original movement of money. We made City Hall the City Hall Complex and that included the 427 Building so we could use the money that was supposed to be for City Hall to fix that building. Maybe my memory is wrong, but I think usually when I talk, I know what I'm talking about. Alright. So, here we go. We object to people working from home. That happened in the previous administration. If you want me to, I have the report, how many people were working from home, not one day, not two days, we had an employee that worked the whole time till he retired working from home, under the previous administration. It's funny that we're now, we don't want the employees to work from home, but when it was the previous administration, it was okay. Not one day, not two days, the whole time, from beginning to end. I know at least one person that only came to City Hall when requested, working from home, in another county. Okay. Now, let me tell you what else. We're talking about misleading people. Hello. Who is sending the stuff misleading people? We have chosen to put politics first, not we, the mayor has chosen to put the politics first and then he complains about other people doing it. The bottom-line here is, number one, I object to having the main door to City Hall locked and I discussed it with the previous administration, and guess what, it's still locked. That building belongs to the residents, belongs to us, that's the people's City Hall. How come that door is still closed. Oh, we didn't care about that item, but now we're very concerned because the residents may not be able to go into City Hall. Hello. Don't have two standards. One standard. If that is the people's building, how come we have to go in the back instead of the front, because you agreed to it with the previous administration, and I challenge that. Okay. So, I'm tired of double standards, when its convenient for one its good, when its convenient for the other it's no good. I'm sorry. Our

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charge, your charge, you were elected, all five of you were elected, you should be concerned about the building, you should be concerned about how the state of the building is, as a concern. The people of this city, the residents, the taxpayers, and foremost the people that have to work there and please don't tell me that its safe, please don't tell me that working there is safe, because you know what, nobody should be working in this way. Finance has been out of there for I don't know how long, it hasn't been an issue. I don't know now it's an issue. It wasn't an issue before. Stop making – sir, you're not listening, I guess I'll stop, because if you're going to be texting, I'll stop, because you know what, I may be a pain in your behind, but I'm a resident, I'm a taxpayer, and I deserve to be heard, and I haven't finished yet and you need to listen please.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, how long has...

Mrs. Cruz: It doesn't make any difference. You know how long you talked after each proclamation more than necessary, so please don't go there, don't go there.

Mayor Lago: Please finish.

Mrs. Cruz: And by the way, when Mr. Commissioner Fernandez was talking about your pocket item – yes, there was a pocket item that you forgot to put in the agenda, you forgot to make it a time certain, but when you have Willy Bermello, one of the Prescott's and the community person here, everything stopped, including the time certain because it was your pocket item, you wanted discussed, because you wanted to take away what Commissioner Fernandez was doing about the veterans. I'm sorry, you cannot have it both ways. Its either the same for everybody or nobody should be able to do it and that includes you, because you're one of five. You're not better than anybody else.

Mayor Lago: So, before we move onto the next person, I'd like to clarify that. I appreciate her bringing to my attention the pocket item. I completely forgotten what it was, so many items, I forget. The pocket item, I welcome for you to get involved, if you'd like, anyone who's listening today and thank you for bringing it up. We are going to be having an organization called LEAF which will benefit police officers. We are going to have a nice event in January. So, if you'd like to benefit families of police officers who are injured in the line of duty or police officers who pass away in the line of duty, we are putting together a fund for Coral Gables police officers and firefighters to be able to help those individuals who pay the ultimate price in service to our community. I would love to take credit for coming up with that, but that was Willy Bermello who brought me the idea and I hope that my colleagues will get involved and donate to this wonderful cause. Thank you for bringing that up. It was a good opportunity for a PSA.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, if I may just add, it was actually on the prior agenda and for some reason didn't reprint. I had put it on the prior agenda, and I asked for it to be deferred to the next

meeting and I didn't notice that it hadn't printed, so my apologies for not having made sure it was on that agenda.

Mayor Lago: It's not a big deal. It's a great cause. I'm excited about it. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Peter Iglesias.

Mayor Lago: So now I have the pleasure of having our previous City Manager, Peter Iglesias, who is here with us today. So, Peter is not only a 50-year resident of the City of Coral Gables, but Peter Iglesias is, not in my opinion, in the opinion of many, the most respected structural engineer not only in South Florida, potentially in the State of Florida. He's an individual who is called to testify in national cases, he's an individual who speaks at universities, is an individual whose resume proceeds him, and served our community with immense, immense respect and dignity. Before you start, Mr. Manager, I'd like for you to consider when you speak addressing, because we heard from Commissioner Fernandez via an email that was sent out to all the residents stating that this building has been neglected since 2011. I'd like for you to talk a little bit about how this building was not neglected, what are the efforts that we took, what happened to the funding, the funding that was in place for City Hall, what did we use that for, and in your expert opinion, in regards to even if the building was not shored, would you consider it to be safe, for it to be inhabited. So again, thank you for being here, taking time out of your busy schedule. I know you have a lot of things going on in the private sector and I wanted you to be here to clear the air and bring truth, bring truth to a lot of politics that are being played here in the Commission.

Mr. Iglesias: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. Yes, I've been a resident for over 50 years in our great city. It was my privilege to be City Manager for almost six years. We've never neglected City Hall. We had a plan to do City Hall. I believe what you mentioned concerning the \$140 million dollar bond issue, that is correct. The Commission, I think wanted to give Commissioner Menendez something and they decided to fund Phillips Park. However, that did not mean that we were not going to fund the City Hall Project, because we were going to use a bond, we were going to bond that project. We felt it was going to be somewhere between 10- and 20-million-dollar bond. So, the idea was, and it's something I spoke with the Commissioner on, that we will be doing both projects, one through more traditional funding, and the other through a bond. City Hall is a complex. You've got the annex building next-door and you've got the building that we purchased across the street. That building was in shambles. It was an embarrassment. We had Planning there. We were working on the third floor with plans everywhere, in the Mezzanine. So, the plan was to move out the third floor, get Development Services out of there. We had Code Enforcement working out of their cars, really something that is not Gables-like.

Mayor Lago: May I interrupt you one second, please.

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Mr. Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Mayor Lago: And I'm going to take a personal point of privilege here. Just so people are aware, because you don't usually get this privilege of having the facts stated by the individual who actually accomplished this with staff. When we removed the individuals, staff from the third floor, this gentleman, along with Surami Cabrera, which has also left the city, who was also an engineer, they built the neighboring building with staff, with staff they built that entire building. They digitized for the first time ever in the city our plans review is done here, and they digitized all the files, millions and millions and millions of files that used to be in file cabinets, that we used to pay storage for every month, that was done by this gentleman. We now have a one-stop shop across the street for Board of Architects, for Permitting, for Code Enforcement, Mr. Douglas Ramirez office, which I visit often, he does a wonderful job, along with his entire team, all those offices are there because of the lead that this gentleman took. It's not the Commission, the lead that this gentleman took and Surami Cabrera. So, I apologize. I want to make sure that people understood, when I say we removed the pressure of the third floor and we took the load, we took that load and we took all those individuals and we moved them to the building next-door, so that people would not have to come into City Hall, would have a more pleasant experience, and that we could now take it to the 21st century, not like the way we had it before.

Mr. Iglesias: It was a monumental task, Mayor. Not only did we have to digitize decades of plans, but we also had to close out permits. We had permits on EDEN, which was our prior system, because we went to a new, to InterGov, a much more modern system. EDEN was more of a finance system that was ported to the Building Department and not very efficient; and then we also had to close out permits that were on EDEN and also, we had thousands of permits on Wintergrade. So, closing out, it was thousands, probably 5-10,000 permits that had to be closed out individually, so it was a monumental task. We have the only one-stop shop in Dade County where we've got Code Enforcement, we've got Planning and Zoning, and Building there, and by the way, that building was funded 47 percent from the Enterprise Fund, only 53 percent from the General Fund.

Mayor Lago: What is the Enterprise Fund mean, Mr. Manager?

Mr. Iglesias: The Enterprise Fund – the state does not allow permit money to go into the General Fund. It has to be used for the Building Department. So, the permit money that was used for the Building Department encompasses about 47 percent of those operations. So, 47 percent of the funding came from the Enterprise Fund; 53 percent came from the General Fund, which that has to be Zoning, Planning, and Code Enforcement and the Board of Architects are really not a Building Department function. So, it was critical for us to start vacating City Hall. So that first phase went very well. Not only did we do that, but we also got a new enterprise system, InterGov, which is used by many of the large cities in the country, so that took a lot of stress of the building. The Building Department was really the one that provided the most stress as far as use is

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concerned. So, we got people out of the third floor, we got drawings out of the third floor, a tremendous amount of weight off the third floor, we also got people out of the Mezzanine and the people out of the annexed building, all into that one-stop shop center. So, that was phase one. Phase two was the Minorca Garage next-door. We have office space on the first floor that we currently have HR and Parking on that first floor. In addition to that, we have temporarily the Passport office, but we do have additional space on the west side, which we had already discussed with the architect Ferguson Glasgow Schuster to design two preliminary design offices for us to move there. So, the idea was phase one, get the Building Department out. Phase two was at the same time, build the Minorca Garage, get our offices out of the fifth floor of this building, which was where Human Resources was, that allowed Finance to move into that space. Phase three was to build out what's left of the Minorca Garage to use as temporary offices so that we could, as you mentioned, vacate City Hall once construction started. So, there was this plan in place. We can't simply move all City Hall to We-Works, it just doesn't work. So, this was an idea where we would have City Hall in this complex still accessible, still functioning and accessible by all the residents. So, we also, as far as City Hall was concerned, Mr. Ernesto Pino, a wonderful architect and ex-director of Public Works, was working with me to solicit the historical architect for City Hall. It's something that's worth looking at whether going through Procurement or going through a waiver to select really the best architects, because it's such an important project, City Hall, for us is an extremely important project. Mr. Wood, who is an excellent engineer, was working with us on various projects, including City Hall. We worked together on numerous historical projects and tried to keep City Hall operational, certainly not with any life safety implications. If there are life safety implications, City Hall is closed.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Manager, in your opinion right now, with the findings of the GPR, yesterday's findings from the slab, which I witnessed personally, the current situation in regards to that one column which is missing some reinforcement, do you believe that with the shoring or without the shoring, but let's use the shoring because its already in place, do you believe that there is a life safety issue and that no one can use that building for the next two to four years?

Mr. Iglesias: No, I do not. I think I've been involved in many historical projects. One in particular that was much worse than the city, than our City Hall, actually not comparable was the Miami-Dade Courthouse. You had a 13-story building, 14-story building that had column issues at the ground floor. So, I worked on that when I was at the City of Miami as Building Official, and that building was shored. I think there was even an issue with the judges, where they were – because people don't understand and people are legitimately afraid, and we met with them, told them that there was no issue, and the building has now been closed. The building is being functional, it's been repaired and operational. So, there was a plan, and we were going to go to an RFQ at the beginning of the year. Mr. Pino and I were discussing whether to go to an RFQ or to simply look at try to get a waiver because of the importance of the building and making sure that we had this top-notch architects.

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Mayor Lago: And I'd like to put one thing on the record also, because the ACM mentioned before about the current condition of the window sample. Who started that window sample, when did that start?

Mr. Iglesias: We did a tremendous amount of work as far as the windows of City Hall, because we knew that that was going to be a huge issue, and that was going to be a very long issue. We worked with – we looked at different windows and wood and aluminum, etc., and we could not match the windows at City Hall. So, we went to Hope Windows, which is the window manufacturer did the windows for Miami High, because they are steel windows and those steel windows, steel being much stronger than concrete, over double, that we could provide windows that knowing that the Historical Board did not want to change the windows and there was a lot of historical issues on the windows. We have a little dilemma. We have windows that are extremely weak and not water resistant, and really do not protect the building. We put shutters up, but those shutters are connected to coral rock which has no structural value, so really more of a water infiltration issue than actual structural issue. So, we worked with Hope Window to work extensively with the architect and with historical to obtain windows that matched as closely as possible to City Hall profile, but it had to be in steel. It took a long time. We put a lot of work in that, and we had the mock-up ready, it was ready in January, and that's something that I was going to personally planned on personally presenting to the Historical Board, because I knew there were a lot of issues as far as keeping the existing windows because the original versus new windows that would be much more water resistant and impact resistant which is a big issue. So, the shutters are ineffective.

Mayor Lago: So one of the things that I want to most take out of this conversation back and forth, which I think is important to memorialize is, the concept that this was kicked down the curb, that you didn't speak with the Commission or the Mayor, or anybody on this dais in regards to City Hall, that it was non-existent, it was something that was not going to be dealt with and that you were just going to pass it on to the next City Manager to address it. Did you have conversations with this Commission and the previous Commission?

Mr. Iglesias: As a matter of fact, the fact that we're having Commission meetings in the CMR right now, we planned for this. This CMR was planned for Commission meetings. We even had one Commission meeting here, which I suggested as a trial, as to having the Commission meetings here. So, the idea was to move here and to the Minorca Garage, use this building, this where we are right now as our Commission meetings and it's worked out very well, as you can see, you have a Commission meeting now. That's not by accident, that's by design.

Mayor Lago: But let me also make sure because the Manager is shaking his head, and I want to make sure the Manager understands what this Manager is saying. This Manager is saying to use this facility while the building is under construction.

Mr. Iglesias: That is correct.

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Mayor Lago: But the building is not under construction. The existing City Hall, existing City Hall is not a threat for a structural collapse, so the purpose of why we had these meetings and we had these discussions and we had these conversations for such a long time, they preceded me was in preparation of finally finishing the architecture, the engineering, finishing all the samples, hiring all the consultants, hiring the contractor, budgeting for the money, because our Finance Director who is here will tell you, she would not commence a job unless there is money in the bank account, that we even talked about it. Remember in Commission meeting talked about potentially doing a two-phase project where we would break it up into different floors. So, this building – I'd love to hear your rebuttal after the Manager speaks.

Commissioner Fernandez: Forgive me, the question was not answered.

Mayor Lago: But I wasn't asking a question.

Commissioner Fernandez: You did. You asked him if he spoke to the Commission, and he started asking about whatever the plan was...

Mayor Lago: Can you give me one second sir, give me one second. I'd like to have Commissioner Fernandez question answered in regards...

Commissioner Fernandez: What question.

Mayor Lago: You're asking for it to be answered, whether you spoke to the Commission, this Commission and previous Commissions about the remodeling efforts of City Hall.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. About the structural issues that were reported in the 2011 letter, 2022 letter, 2023 letter.

Mr. Iglesias: If you look at the budget, we had \$10 million dollars and \$12 million dollars, \$15 million dollars, \$18 million dollars. It's pretty obvious Mayor that you don't spend \$18 million dollars just replacing floors. So, I believe that everybody knew what was happening here. Everybody understood that there was quite a bit of work to be done, of restoration work, of repair work. It's almost a 100-year-old building and one of our marquee buildings, an incredible building.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, for the record your answer is no. You're talking about what's in the budget, what was in the budget, and everybody could assume.

Mr. Iglesias: The answer is yes. The answer is yes, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: You and I never spoke about any structural issues, and I did a public records request. That letter from 2023 when I was already on this dais, was never shared with me. Now you talked about mobility hub a ton of times, you came and talked to be about that, Burger Bob's, how you weren't going to do the work there. I mean the Gondola Building that collapsed,

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we talked about all these things, under your watch, but as far as City Hall, you never discussed with me any structural issues that we had at City Hall.

Mr. Iglesias: Sir, that's untrue.

Commissioner Fernandez: It is true.

Mr. Iglesias: No sir, that is not true.

Commissioner Fernandez: As a former City Manager...

Mr. Iglesias: That is not true.

Commissioner Fernandez: Remember you are under oath when you are discussing with this Commission whenever you during your tenure.

Mr. Iglesias: That is not true.

Mayor Lago: Let me make it very clear, let me make it very clear, because I...

Mr. Iglesias: May I say something Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Let me just say one thing. I called almost ten elected officials before this meeting today, who dealt with the Manager, six, seven, eight elected officials, and they all told me, did we have conversations, because I know that I did and since we can't speak to each other and in my case, you wouldn't even speak to me, since I can't speak to my colleagues that's why, for example, I use the Biltmore as an example, let's have it in the afternoon so that Mr. Prescott can be here to answer your questions, not have staff answer those questions. Mr. Prescott can answer those questions here on the podium, just like the Manager is doing. I have a lot of respect for that. So now, not yet, I'm going to answer you. So, my point is, my point is that the elected officials that I spoke to who answered my calls and I spoke with, I asked them, did we have conversations about City Hall, did you talk to the Manager? They all said yes. We all had conversations about budgeting, about structural issues that we're facing, but you have to understand, you have to understand, and Douglas Wood will tell you, the only way that you can get to the bottom of something is exactly what happened in the building adjacent to where we have, where we completed renovated, where we have now our permitting department. You have to skin away the walls, see the existing structure, see the NEPs, understand what's behind those walls, behind the drywall, and then you get a better picture of the actual condition of the building. That is standard construction practice. You do all the radar, you do all the ground penetrating radar, and guess what, the ground penetrating radar that was done on the slab was wrong, was wrong. It said that it was a hollow area, and it was not. I was there. The structural team that was there doing the work yesterday, I took the pictures, I put it up there, said Vince, this is all built with lime rock, its perfectly fine, its not an issue. I guess the GPR made a mistake, and that happens. It's happened

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to me before on job sites. We think it's a hollow area and its not, and I think that Mr. Wood will attest to that. No machine is perfect. So at the end of the day to say that, you didn't get any notification is incorrect and you can continue to say that, but the bottom-line is that you don't see an item on the budget that's your fault, if you saw an item on the budget for 12, 13, 14 million dollars that said and you don't say hey, what is that on the budget, why is there \$14 million dollars, what is it for, for flooring or windows. You knew the windows was going to be \$2 million dollars, we're advocating for it. You knew what the budgets were. You knew exactly what we were trying to do in City Hall. We talked about the fact that in Tallahassee we did not receive an appropriation for the windows. We talked about the issues that we are having with City Hall. So at the end of the day, I mean its proof, the proof is there, we even talked about it in a Commission meeting that we didn't get money for the windows in City Hall, so you knew we were talking about hardening the building, you knew there were issues with the building, and if you want to say, blame it on somebody else, that's perfectly fine, but in the real world, in the private sector world, you can't blame people for issues that we're facing, you have to face up to them and move forward with those issues.

Commissioner Fernandez: I agree, and I think that's what you're trying not to do. So, here's the problem, you're making assurances of what conversations I had with the City Manager, are you tapping our offices and listening to conversations, because I have been told that its potentially happening.

Mayor Lago: I'm going to give you an answer.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, no.

Mayor Lago: Can I give you an answer. You asked a question.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because that's the only way you'd be able to give me an assurance of what conversations the former City Manager and I had.

Mayor Lago: Let me give you an answer to that, its very simple. The issue is beyond simple. I don't think that you lack the competency to understand a budget and look at a budget which says 18, 14, 15 million dollars, and when somebody tells you that the funding is for x, y and z, like Melissa Castro says, our Commissioner says, either you don't remember, you have issues with your eyesight, but to tell me today that you didn't know that 15, 16 million dollars in a budget was being used to repair a building structurally, what do you think it was going to be used for, for frescos and for rug, it doesn't make any sense, it doesn't make any sense, even the Manager cannot even tell you, the Manager cannot even believe that story. That is so outlandish and so ridiculous, you are just looking to blame somebody else for something. The issue now is, how do we get it done, and the issue is, you want to make this giant story, so it gets published tomorrow in the blogs and it says, you know Vince Lago is anti-safety and he wants to put the employees and the residents

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in trouble and the building is going to collapse. To one point you even were so extreme that you said that this is like Champlain Towers. I mean think about using the example of Champlain Towers in a Commission meeting to scare people when you have two exceptional engineers in the room that are telling you, three with Joe, our ACM, that will tell you, this building is nowhere near in danger of having any structural issues. You see an issue a matter, you address it, we've done it always in construction, but to say to use Champlain Towers that's politicizing, scaring people. Look at the email that you sent after you got your hands on this email. What did I do. I sent it to the DCM, and I said, Mr. DCM, Mr. Parjus, I sent it to Mr. Parjus, please review this item, talk to Code Enforcement, find out what work was done without a permit, we need to get to the bottom of it. What did you do. You sent out an email that said, shocking, shocking the Biltmore. Its shock and awe. That's not what we do in the city. We've always done things the right way, we open it up to the public and we are having it here. I invited – how much more transparency do you want. You have the City Manager here, the previous City Manager, who is willing to answer any question. This is not about putting things under the rug, or not being transparent, you don't like the answers, and you don't have the competency to understand what's happening in regard to the building and you're blaming it on other people. The number was in the budget. Its clear as day. Its online like Maria Cruz likes to say. Read the budget. What did you think 18, 15, 16 million dollars was for?

Commissioner Fernandez: So, let's go over that.

Commissioner Castro: Yes, so to put on the record...

Commissioner Fernandez: It actually was...

Commissioner Castro: Give me one second. To put on the record, you didn't speak to me about anything that had to do with the building. What we did speak about numerous times was about the windows, plenty of times. Now, about the structure and all of this that's happening with the building, we did not have one conversation.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, a few points.

Mr. Iglesias: We had, if I may answer.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir, go ahead.

Mr. Iglesias: We had multiple budget meetings where we discussed them individually with every Commissioner. We have \$15 million dollars, as far as the budget, as far as City Hall; \$15 million dollars is not just to replace the actual floors. I discussed this, I don't know how many times, as far as phase one getting the Building Department out of there, as far as doing a structural assessment. Now, what Mr. Wood found is something new. He went into a column and found something new.

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Mayor Lago: Can you stop there Mr. Manager, one second, because you brought up...

Commissioner Fernandez: Let him finish.

Mayor Lago: You brought up a very good point.

Commissioner Fernandez: He interrupted and...

Mayor Lago: I want to hear the point. You said that Mr. Wood found something new. When did Mr. Wood find this?

Mr. Iglesias: I just found out about it, as far as that particular column.

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you a question? Can I ask you a question?

Mr. Iglesias: Yes. We looked at the actual drawings of the building and we also looked at a lot of a number of photographs that historical has on the construction of the building. This was a professionally done building. This was not – and so, I think that Mr. Wood, as I mentioned, is an excellent engineer, is correct. He is shoring, so he can do a more in-depth study as to what's going on there. How many buildings have been shored, Vizcaya, the Biltmore, certainly a major one was the actual courthouse. Sometimes you find things that are different from the drawings, unusual on this building, because all the work that we've done so far, had done so far pretty much was in line with the actual drawings. So, it's something that I think Mr. Wood needs to further clarify and is providing shoring in the interim, I think is very prudent just in case, and it also helps people feel better also.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: I was in the middle of having...

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor go ahead.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We do have a Chair on this Commission for a reason.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I was speaking, the City Manager interrupted. I had the floor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Chair. Just a few questions because my first time on this Commission was in May of 2021, and I know I sat down with you and went through precisely the area of City Hall carving out how much money was needed for particular items, okay – the windows, the estimates for structural, etc., and while we were sitting in the first floor conference room and you had a board like this over a section of wall and we discussed what was behind that section of wall. Can you enlighten the rest of the members of the Commission and the public as well approximately when that was, and the details and the reason why there was a hole in the wall.

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Mr. Iglesias: Vice Mayor that was years ago, and we were looking at all the restoration aspects of the building. Actually, the first thing we did was stabilize the building by reroofing, because we had a lot of water infiltration and so, the first thing we did was actually stabilize the building. I forgot to mention that, so that we would remove the water infiltration, the damage to the actual building. And as an answer to Commissioner Castro, did I say that this building is about to fall down? – never, but I did mention that the first phase was moving, getting the load off the building by getting the Development Services team into the new one-stop shop and then we would do a further check and by the way, when we were able to get, we did even more work, when the third floor was moved, we were able to demo some of that third floor to do additional testing on the concrete, looked to see what the construction techniques were. Pretty much they were what we saw on those photographs. It was consistent with some of those historical photographs. So, Mr. Wood did concrete cores, and we were moving forward to really get the architect, get everybody, get the drawings completed, that was in January, and move forward with the restoration of the building with everyone in this Public Safety Building and the Minorca Garage. What you saw is us looking extensively at the existing drawings, photographs, looking at – We were very careful with destructive testing because of course, the inside of the building is also historical, so we have to really be very careful with that. However, that I think everybody knew that phase one was getting Development Services out; phase two was getting the Minorca Garage, that was common knowledge. I spoke about this to everyone really ad nauseum.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a quick question, through the Chair. The concerns to move the employees out of the third floor was regarding structural issues dealing with the third floor, correct.

Mr. Iglesias: No. There were no structural issues dealing with the third floor. We just wanted to get them out as phase one to eventually get everybody out of the building so when we start construction, we do it as one whole project and not have to do it floor by floor and things like that.

Commissioner Menendez: Because you mentioned loading concerns.

Mr. Iglesias: No. No. It helps the building because you are getting loads out, right, the more loads you get the better it is. It was only people, files, a tremendous amount of paper, which is quite heavy, but was a structural concern – no. It was just getting people out so we could come in and do the building in one shot. I think it's faster.

Commissioner Menendez: So loading wasn't an issue.

Mr. Iglesias: No. Not at all.

Commissioner Fernandez: Am I able to ask my question to him.

Mayor Lago: Of course you can, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because I think there is a false narrative that is being spread here that if there is \$15 million dollars in the budget, it must have been for structural work. However, I remember we approved the work that had to be done at the Alhambra Water Tower. I don't know if the Budget Director is here if she can come in to tell us what the cost of the work that has to be done there, including the Mayor said, work on frescos is cheap. I think that was a large part and you may remember of the \$1.25 or \$1.5 million dollars just for the Alhambra Water Tower. Here we're talking about a three-story City Hall building. Madam Director, do you remember the numbers on the Alhambra Water Tower?

Mr. Iglesias: About \$1.8 million.

Budget Director Rodriguez: So, the current budget for the Alhambra Water Tower is about \$1.3 million and about \$800,000 of that is coming from insurance due to damage because of Hurricane Irma.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right. The Alhambra Water Tower is \$1.3 million dollars, so if we're presented with a budget of \$15 million dollars for City Hall, nothing in that says there are structural issues and as you just told Commissioner Menendez, the load bearing, removing people from the third floor was about opening up space in order for the eventual construction. It wasn't about structural issues. So, you just confirmed it wasn't presented to us that there was a structural problem at City Hall, and I'd like to call up the ACM regarding the list of issues that Mr. Wood had presented to us. How many of those items had actually been addressed prior to you coming on board, how many items were there and how many were actually addressed prior to you coming on board ACM Gomez?

Assistant City Manager Gomez: I believe the list had 16 or 18 items on that report that we've slowly been addressing through that and its important to note that the shoring that is being installed is for the structural repairs that are necessary to recertify the building, the 40-year recertification.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, but how many of the items were actually done prior to you taking on this project? We discussed this at a Commission meeting.

Assistant City Manager Gomez: From that list, none of the items had been addressed because we kept asking Doug Wood to reissue the letter to give us an additional time. So, since that point, we've been able to start addressing all those issues.

Commissioner Fernandez: So since at least 2022, the items that were on Doug Wood's letters that said we had 30-days to address them, had not been addressed and they weren't addressed until the new City Manager took over and ACM Gonzalez, Gomez came on board to address those issues. I always go back to this. The Vice Mayor was championing the cause for the Gondola Building, she was out there three months before it collapsed, she brought it up, and it was allowed to collapse. I mean structural work in our city has been deficient on more than one facility. The Alhambra

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Water Tower was never a priority until we got on board and Commissioner Menendez, Castro and I made sure that it was approved in last year's budget, and you talk about continuing to kick the can down the road, that is what has happened time after time after time, and you like to say that in this city we do things right. Let me tell you, there was a mandate from the residents of this city last election, which questioned the way that things were getting done and they wanted to be included in the process, they wanted transparency, because you mentioned the Country Club as this perfect way that things were done in the past, that was bundled. That was a disaster. You had police officers from Miami-Dade County showing up to kick out a family who was running that operation. If that's the crowning jewel of the way things should be done, that's absolutely not. I think we need to ensure that going forward we have a plan in place to address these issues before they continue to grow, and as I told the City Manager, if there's an issue that needs to be addressed, I want to find out about it, and we want to discuss it out in the open in a Commission meeting, so that we can take action, because at the end of the day, Mr. Mayor, I know you like to say that, oh, its because there is an election and because we're blaming Vince Lago. This isn't about Vince Lago. I mean the whole world doesn't revolve around Vince Lago. It revolves around the City of Coral Gables and forging a path forward to ensure that we're addressing the issues that have not been addressed or have just not been a priority. You're right. Some of these issues just weren't a priority, but I think if prior Commissions had understood that there were structural issues, my predecessor, Commissioner Castro's predecessor, all of our predecessors had really understood that action needed to be taken earlier, we wouldn't be here in this position today, and I reference back to the meeting from August 27th, at 4:45:35, 4:46:07, 4:50:27, 4:51:29, you praised the work of Mr. Wood and how he is the perfect person to make decisions on what's going on at City Hall. You then go on to say at 4:51:47 and 4:55:13 that if Doug Wood believes that we should leave City Hall, you are the first one leaving City Hall, but now you are calling into question this gentleman's integrity because its not politically convenient for you. Leave politics aside, throw it out the window. Here we are today, making a decision on making sure that City Hall is here, not just to this centennial, but for the next centennial, for future generations to enjoy. A building that was designed and as you said and as Mr. Wood said, it was designed in a proper way, and it was constructed in a proper way at the time. It's been there 100 years, unless we maintain it, unless we do what needs to be done to shore it up, that's on us now. Whatever happened in the past, we have to leave it in the past. We need to make decisions going forward and I know you are against taking out a bond because you want to put money aside for three or four years, we need to tackle this now. We cannot continue to allow it to deteriorate. Our offices have blue tape on the windows, just to see if there is water intrusion, and I commend, the Vice Mayor mentioned that she and Commissioner Menendez made that their priority when they came on board and they laid the groundwork, and it has taken a while. Mr. Iglesias, while you were Manager, we had numerous conversations about the windows and I supported every single thing you said about those windows, making sure that we tighten the envelope, as you like to say, and you also talked about what we needed to do with the limestone around the building and you said that was an expensive process.

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You did talk about those things, but you never talked about the beams, you never talked about the structural issues that we had inside the building. It was always about, we need to restore, renovate City Hall, restore it, and that's not cheap, because work in historic preservation does cost money, we did talk about that. We talked about the exterior of the building, but I do not appreciate you coming in here and telling me you said something about the structure when you did not, because you absolutely did not talk about the structural issues at City Hall.

Mr. Iglesias: I did not talk about the current issue that Mr. Wood came up with because that was not addressed at that time, but I did tell you that the issues about the clotting issues about the window, and the issues that we had to get out of City Hall to do the actual work, and I did tell you that we were taking cores and analyzing the building to make sure that it was structurally correct. Did I tell you that the building was about to fall down? – no, I did not, because that's not true, because that's simply not true. The building is not about to fall down. So no, I did not say that, did not say that to Commissioner Castro either, because that is not true, because we did not move the third floor because it was going to fall down, but we had to do an extensive analysis on that building to renovate the building, to renovate the building, and that's what Mr. Wood is doing, and I did say, Mr. Wood is an excellent engineer, I've known him for decades and that he found something that's not per plan, that's not per the number of pictures that we looked at. Its something that needs to be looked at. He is shoring it, to give him time to properly analyze it, to see if there is a structural change that made that column like that. There could be a structural change that he has not had time to do, so it's a very good thing to do, to shore the building, get time, analyze the building properly, analyzing the building further. You mentioned the Gondola Building, it's been there for 90 years, so please don't criticize 90 years of Commissions. Let's talk about the Water Tower, very familiar with the Water Tower. The problem with the Water Tower is that it's a French structure. It's a concrete frame and its frame inside. That building will have to be replaced every ten years. It will be a million-and-a-half to \$2 million dollars every ten years, that's what it is, that's what it is. It's the way it was built. That's the way it was built. Very unusual because Mr. Merrick used to do everything...yet that was done – all those walls are actually frame construction. It doesn't last a long time with our humidity. We actually found the original drawings that were done by Ferguson Glasgow Schuster and Mr. Wood, and we were working on that to get that done, but that would be a continuous ten-year, \$2 million dollar project and that's just what it is, right. So yes, I think it was very clear that everything we had to do at City Hall, it was made very clear. It was not – I'm not a dooms-day person, you may be Commissioner, I am not. This is not a Champlain Towers issue. It is not. As a matter of fact, I worked on Champlain Towers for Dade County. I was there when the demolition took place with Mayor Cava, helping on the implosion plan. So, I'm very aware of what happened at Champlain Towers, very aware of what's going on at City Hall. This is not gloom and doom. We have an excellent engineer working on it, who is very prudent who will guide the way to get a proper job. Does City Hall need to be evacuated once Mr. Wood's shoring is in place – no, it does not, does not. It's a well-designed building. Does it need

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restoration? – absolutely, absolutely. The plan that we had and the plan that I think is moving forward is getting everybody out and getting that beautiful building back to what it used to be.

Mayor Lago: So let me answer your statements. Just to memorialize a few things. Number one, I apologize, item E-3 has been deferred, the sponsor has requested item E-3 be deferred. So, let's start off with...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, so those who don't have an agenda in hand that is the Mediterranean design item. I know Mayor Thomson was here to speak on that, as well as some other folks, so we'll put it for the next Commission meeting and I'm sorry Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor for being here, I apologize. So, the first item that Commissioner Fernandez mentioned about \$15 million dollars that were in the budget. How did I know that that work was for structural work or for flooring or for rugs. I remember you clearly told me when I asked you, Commissioner, you have 102 percent raises that are in the budget, you haven't had a transparent conversation. You haven't brought this to light, you haven't talked to people, you haven't had a Town Hall meeting, what happened, and your response was, on the record it was, well people can read the budget, people can read the budget. The money has been in the budget for years, the money was in the budget for years. It's up to you, it's up to you, like I did with him, our City Manager, when I brought to my attention, I said, Mr. Manager, why is there \$300,000 of additional money in the item in regard to salaries for Commissioners. And he said, well, Mayor, the issue is x, y and z, this is the way that the Commissioners wanted it, and they put it on the agenda, and I had to do what three of the Commissioners tell me to do. And I said, okay, no problem, I understand it. If you see a \$15 million dollar line item which is the largest line item in our budget and you don't ask a question, again, that shows a lack of due diligence, a lack of care, and in my opinion, a lack of competency like I said, so that's number one. Number two, you mentioned the issue of the Country Club. The Country Club was an absolute debacle and what I'm going to do right now, because of our City Attorney who's here and she can wave her head if I'm correct, or if I'm wrong. When I went to see her, I said, we need to have a public conversation in regard to what's going on with the Country Club. I have a lot of residents that are coming to me, that are asking me questions, are their memberships in danger, what's the plan for the Country Club. The City Attorney which is the same thing that she did for me, in regard to the Biltmore issue, thank you Madam Mayor, the same thing that she did for me with the Biltmore when I called her, because I received your email with the word "shocking" on it from the Biltmore, as if it were back in the blogging days. She told me, I said, well, I'd like to put out a statement in regard to the Biltmore. She told me, we want to preserve our rights legally, don't do that. I disagree. Am I correct, yes or no.

City Attorney Suarez: Generally, Mayor yes, we prefer for the city to speak with one voice, and we don't want to compromise our legal position.

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Mayor Lago: So in regards to the Country Club, we took a step back, we let our attorneys – I remember when Miriam Ramos was here, because I was in a business trip in New York and I got a phone call in regards to moving forward what we were going to do, and I held that phone conversation on the street in New York with the City Manager, Miriam Ramos, Cristina, and other members of the City Attorney and outside counsel in regards to what we would do moving forward, to address the issues, because we found many deficiencies. We found things that were not correct, and we handled that accordingly and we've done millions of dollars of renovations and staff did a wonderful job addressing that issue, and people are more than happy in regard to the Country Club under the city's leadership. You want to say something Mr. Manager.

Mr. Iglesias: Mayor, I have never said this before, but we even found the fire alarm had been tampered with and was not working and it was jumped so it would all be green. So, we found some things in there that were incredible, that we certainly were not expecting. I'm not going to say everything we found, but I've never seen that before in my 40 years.

Mayor Lago: And another comment to address Commissioner Fernandez what he said the frescos are cheap, I never said that. What I said was very simple, you are not spending \$15 million dollars on frescos, at least not under my watch. I would never spend that amount of money. Yes, its going to cost money to restore the frescos that are there, if they are historic and our Historic Director will tell us if they're historic or not, because there are certain things that are not historic and we've noticed that, and I'm talking about City Hall. If those frescos are historic they will be replaced and it will be brought to the original splendor, but we are not spending \$15 million dollars in historic and if you know about construction there is a \$15 million dollar line item on the budget, what you do is you take a step back, you sit with the City Manager and you do what I did when I saw the raises that were proffered by Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Menendez, and Commissioner Castro. I said, what is this money, I disagree with this. And guess what, they won, they proceeded, and the budget increased on salaries went forward, but if you see a \$15 million dollar line item, its your responsibility as an elected official to say, what is this \$15 million dollar, what is it going for. Okay, its going for restoration of City Hall. Breakdown the restoration, I'd like to understand what that is. Again, that's an issue of competency and doing your job. Very similar to what we've had before when you haven't answered your emails and you said, hey, I never received this email, and it was proven to you in a meeting, hey you did receive the email. The problem is that you haven't read your emails.

Commissioner Fernandez: They were sent to the wrong person.

Mayor Lago: No, they were sent to the right person.

Commissioner Fernandez: It was sent to afernandez, its not my email address, the address of a police officer.

Mayor Lago: I have the copy of the email.

Commissioner Fernandez: It was requested as Alberto Juan Carlo which is your alias.

Mayor Lago: That's not my alias. I don't have aliases.

Commissioner Fernandez: But you make the records request, and the Clerk is here.

Mayor Lago: My point is, listen, concentrate. Listen, remember, Ariel, you are no longer...

Commissioner Fernandez: Commissioner Fernandez.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fernandez, you are no longer a blogger, you are a Commissioner now. Remember, you represent the people. You are not supposed to be the first one to deliver the news no matter if its wrong or its right. You are now a Commissioner, we have to work on behalf of the residents. For example, the Country Club, it was a very difficult thing. By the way, nobody threw anybody out there with police officers, okay. Just so you know, those people I understand were your friends, I understand that, and you got many perks at the Country Club through those individuals, but hold on a minute, hold on a minute...

Commissioner Fernandez: That's false information.

Mayor Lago: Its not. It's not false information.

Commissioner Fernandez: That's false information.

Mayor Lago: The problem is...

Commissioner Fernandez: And you are displaying as a member of this dais, and you are violating the civility code.

Mayor Lago: You're not.

Commissioner Fernandez: Your civility code, the one that you passed.

Mayor Lago: I'm not.

Commissioner Fernandez: This is not the first time though.

Mayor Lago: You can censure me again, if you'd like. So, my point is, my point is, very simple, you, you did not like the way that was handled. That was handled professionally, and we found many things that the Manager will tell you in regard to construction, life-safety issues, and not only that, what they were doing financially that went against the residents in this community for years and years and years. We had many meetings with the leaseholders, and we had discussions that said, bring us your books. We reviewed the books. We reviewed all the documents. We did a

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walk-through of the building and at the end of the day, the city took the building over and that was in the best interest of the city. So, if you're going to tell me that you don't know why there's a \$15 million dollar line item in the budget – I can say listen, \$15,000, \$50,000, \$20,000, certain items that are miniscule, maybe you don't see them, but a \$15 million dollar line item, which is the largest tranche of money in a construction project that we have, outside of the Public Safety Building, which was done three or four years ago, that to me again is, doesn't make sense. So, moving on, moving on with that issue.

Commissioner Menendez: Well, the Mayor actually, just for a clarification for those watching. The decision regarding the Country Club and having Community Recreation take over, took place by the Commission February 2022. Cristina became City Attorney in February of 2023, so Cristina though she was part of the team, she wasn't the actual City Attorney at that time when the whole Country Club situation. I just wanted to clarify the timeline.

Mayor Lago: Let me add on to the Commissioner's statement. Madam City Attorney, how long were we in negotiations in regard to the Country Club?

City Attorney Suarez: Sir, I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: It was before you became City Attorney, correct.

City Attorney Suarez: Correct. All of that happened before I became City Attorney. I do not know how long those negotiations, at this moment, I don't recall.

Mayor Lago: So, my timeline in regard to the way that was conducted is correct. I was on a phone call in New York with the attorney's office and the City Manager to move forward in addressing issues. Listen, this job is a very difficult job. You are going to make people happy and you are going to make people unhappy, but at the end of the day, at the end of the day, the purpose is to sit down and work cohesively, not to be the first one to send out 35,000 emails saying, "shocking news" you know I got this email and I'm putting it out there without allowing staff to finish their report, without allowing the professionals to finish their report. So, you just said, Mr. Wood – Mr. Wood is one of the most – when I introduced him, I said he is one of the most respected individuals in this community. I hold him in high regard. He is a person that I've had the pleasure of being with on multiple occasions in regard to business, where the private sector and everyone speaks about the Manager, Peter Iglesias, and in regard to Douglas Wood in the highest regard as engineers in the private sector. Please, don't say I'm disparaging this gentleman, because that's the last thing I would do, but one thing and to close out so that you can move forward, very simple. You heard what Mr. Wood said, and he can repeat it again, the building is shored, the building is habitable, its not a safety issue. He said it, its on the record when he spoke and now you've heard it also from another structural engineer, Peter Iglesias. We have taken extraordinary precautions

to make sure that the building is safe. Mr. Manager, even if we had not shored the building, would the building be safe for being habitable right now, yes or no.

Mr. Iglesias: I defer to the engineer of record on that being an engineer.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Wood, I asked you a question.

Mr. Iglesias: But I do think that, as you mentioned, I mentioned this, Mr. Wood is an excellent engineer, and he is shoring it in the utmost of caution and to be able to analyze the building further. So, with respect to Mr. Wood, which I have known for decades and has always been an excellent engineer, I defer to him. I don't know what's been found, but I do think that if Mr. Wood says, the shoring, the building is safe, I have no problems working in that building.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Mr. Iglesias: And let me just say that I worked in the building, I wasn't working across the street, so I don't believe I'm suicidal.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: It is past noon. You have spoken probably 75 percent of this meeting on one item. I think its time to move on and stay on topic.

Mayor Lago: I think it's a beautiful opportunity to clear the air and I think the residents want to hear what's going on in their City Hall, especially under our historic gem and what we are doing as a city, because I talked to residents all the time and we are on topic, by the way, who tells me, Vince, when does City Hall start, next week, two weeks, I hear we are moving out. I said, no, no, no, no. City Hall is not starting for a minimum, minimum of a year and nine months to two years. So we are on topic, its on the public record and we've had two exceptional exerts here, along with Mr. Gomez, who is also an engineer, who has given us their opinion and staff is doing a wonderful job and please, for the record, when I'm quoted tomorrow on the blogs, I do not want to have anybody die in the building, this is not Champlain Towers, like Commissioner Fernandez said. This is an opportunity to have City Hall open during an election year, which is critically important and allow some of our staff to continue to do business in that building.

Commissioner Castro: And you realize you continue to talk.

Mayor Lago: I do, and I will continue to talk.

Commissioner Castro: People are here to listen, people come to listen to the whole agenda and pay some respect to them. I think its enough. You said the same thing probably ten times.

Mayor Lago: Maybe I can say it eleven.

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Commissioner Castro: One time is more than enough. We have very educated employees and residents.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we still have a member of the public who requested to speak on this item, Mr. Rip Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you. Is the mic working.

Commissioner Fernandez: Just get close to it.

Mr. Holmes: Say it again.

Commissioner Fernandez: Get close to it.

Mr. Holmes: Thank you. So, yes, I appreciate your help on that. I'm really floored with the fact that the former City Manager Iglesias has been hiding these structural problems at City Hall for at least six years. He's hidden it from the public. So, you've got the public and now Mayor Vince Lago says, oh, no, no, nothing to see here, people can keep coming to City Hall, so he's part of this hiding of a really serious problem, but the public keep coming, maybe get environmentally damaged and we end up with people suing City Hall for having government in secret. This is actually reminiscent of the government in secret that led to the zoning code that nobody knew about and was a horrendous scandal and very seriously continues to damage the city. This was government in secret. Former City Manager Iglesias knew, he's admitting today, he knew that there was a problem, and he was secretly trying to move people out of City Hall. He says he moved them to the building next-door. He says he was planning to move them even here, but now they are objecting to doing that. He says that they were secretly planning to do offices on Minorca, but he never informed the public, because I attend these meetings very frequently, I would know. It was all in secret and now what else are they keeping secret. That's the real problem, and Mayor Lago you said that this is some kind of an election ploy by Ariel Fernandez. I think actually you made it an election issue, because you've been hiding the fact that City Hall has structural problems, and you are continuing to hide it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir. Alright. We are going to move onto item 2-1, time certain 11 o'clock.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. I make a motion to pull F-2.