

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items E-1
January 28, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item E-1 [9:27:41 a.m.]

Personal appearance by Maria Cruz regarding City Administration

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Personal appearance Maria Cruz. Ms Cruz you have, good morning, you have a good day and you have five minutes.

Ms. Cruz: It will be shorter than that. Good morning, Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I'm here, I requested this personal appearance to share some concerns that I and some residents have been discussing. The concern is who runs the City, this beautiful City day-to-day? I went back to the Charter and of course it says the City Manager does, that's the way its supposed to be. The process should work. People volunteer to serve as Commissioners and Mayor. They go to an election, they get elected. They appoint or reappoint the City Manager, very good. The City Manager then gets direction from the Commissioners to what they want him to do. He tells the staff. Now this is where the little problems start. Staff has been here for a long time or newcomers, whichever, and they because they know more, they are professionals, they are experienced, they decide whether

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what the Commission decided is OK, and they go ahead and do it, or they tweak it to fit what they think would be best or they push back and delay their stuff till people forget and it never happens, because obviously they know best. The Commission trusts you all trust and sometimes there are not even questions about it, it just happens. The staff sometimes misleads the Commission when the Commission asks questions, tries to change their minds. We had an example not long ago about an employee telling the Commission what they had to do about the sidewalks. Our employees forget that they work for the people. That they are employed by the people. That they answer to the people the same as you all do. Because the problem is that we can change Commissioners, because when you run again we can say no, but we cannot change the employees, because the employees, the only person that can decide an employee shouldn't be working here is the City Manager. So the City Manager has the power to rain in the employees that are doing things that the residents don't want. Let me give an example how you and the public are misled. Right here you had a City employee that told you that there are five arborists certified, registered arborists working for the City of Coral Gables. Well, first of all, there isn't one listed in the budget. The last three years that I have access to, there is no City Arborist, that's OK. There are five certified registered arborists. I looked at their certificates, yes, there are, but according to Brook Dannemiller who is the person in charge of that, only one was fulltime taking care of the trees, only one, just one. So, I ask on Saturday, other people asked, so what does the others do? – Oh, they have other tasks. So in reality when we are told there are five arborists, lay people think, Oh, there are five people taking care of trees. No. They are certified arborists, but they don't take care of trees, they do other tasks. OK. Now, because I asked, I said OK, so how do you know the tree is sick? Do you think arborists go out and check? No. The tree-trimming company report when they find a tree that's diseased or whatever the case, or the resident report it and then they send out the arborist. The best way that I could reason this out, and by the way, there is posting on the website that talks about the trees and they mention how many trees we have, three hundred and eighty-sum thousand, and they bring up how the five arborists takes care of the trees...yes a humungous number of trees, but it brings up the five arborists again, even though one is the one that kept the tree, alright. And it also says that every year we lose about 125 trees. Now if we lose about 125, perhaps in my mind, if more arborists were taking care of trees, maybe we wouldn't lose so many, that's number one, but to make it easy for you to understand. If you want to ask how many attorneys or lawyers work in the City of Coral Gables, you'd be surprised. There are a whole bunch of attorneys, people that went to law school, got their degree...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: In this Commission don't mess with attorneys.

Ms. Cruz: But guess what, but guess what Mayor, there are only a few that work for the City Attorney. The fact that they have a degree does not make them working as attorney, that's my point. The fact that there are certified arborists doesn't mean that they take care of trees.

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please conclude Maria. Thank you.

Ms. Cruz: OK. Well let me finish please.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please.

Ms. Cruz: OK. With the Alhambra Circle issue, OK, and this is just a comment. I spoke with the City Manager. The City Manager agreed that if the people didn't want it, that was that. He contacted the employee, said you know, take that walk-through the website. Guess what, the next day it was back on. The employees decide what the City needs, they are the experts and if they agree with the City Manager they will do it, if not, they won't. I think the time has come to rain him in and say, whatever the City Manager tells you to do, that's what you do, and the City Manager needs to know that whatever the Commission ask him to do, that's what has to happen, not their private agendas. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Maria. Thank you.

[End: 9:34:36 a.m.]