

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Items 2-1, G-1 and I-1 are related**  
**March 29, 2022**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Michael Mena**

**Commissioner Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Jorge Fors**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Parks and Recreation Director, Fred Couceyro**

**Finance Director, Diana Gomez**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Samuel Lawson**

**Maria Cruz**

**Karelia Martinez Carbonell**

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Agenda Items 2-1, G-1 and I-1 are related [12:47 p.m.]

A Resolution of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board requesting that the City Commission pursue a separate referendum for the War Memorial Youth Center Master Plan.

A Resolution of the City Commission authorizing the issuance, subject to the Bond Referendum herein provided for, of General Obligation Indebtedness in an Aggregate Principal Amount not to exceed \$60 Million for the City of Coral

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City Commission Meeting

March 29, 2022

Agenda Items 2-1, G-1 and I-1 are related - Resolution of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board requesting that the City Commission pursue a separate referendum for the War Memorial Youth Center Master Plan and Resolution authorizing the issuance of General Obligation Indebtedness in an Aggregate Principal Amount not to exceed \$60 Million for providing funds to finance or refinance the construction, expansion, renovation and improvements of the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center and Phillips Park.

Gables, Florida, for providing funds to finance or refinance the construction, expansion, renovation and improvements of the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center and Phillips Park, payable from the full faith, credit, and ad valorem taxing power of the City; providing for and calling a Bond Referendum of the Qualified Electors of the City to be held on November 8, 2022; providing for Official Ballots; providing for Bond Referendum procedures; and providing for an effective date.

(Sponsored by Commissioner Menendez)

Parks Masterplan General Obligation Bond referendum item.

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item 2-1 and G-1, which were 11 AM time certain, and I apologize to the sponsor.

Commissioner Menendez: That was a lot of fun.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Attorney Ramos: A resolution of the City Commission authorizing the issuance, subject to the Bond Referendum herein provided for, of a General Obligation Indebtedness in an Aggregate Principal Amount not to exceed \$60 Million for the City of Coral Gables, Florida, providing funds to finance or refinance the construction, expansion, renovation and improvements of the Coral Gables War Memorial Youth Center and Phillips Park, payable from the full faith and credit, and ad valorem taxing power of the City; providing for and calling a Bond Referendum of the Qualified Electors of the City to be held on November 8, 2022; providing for an Official Ballot; providing for Bond Referendum procedures; and providing for an effective date. This is a public hearing item, and it is related to G-1 and I-1 -- and 2-1 -- G-1, 2-1, and I-1 are all related.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you, Madam City Attorney. The purpose of this resolution is a continuation of our discussion the last couple Commission meetings regarding the Parks Master

Plan and a proposed referendum going before the City voters November of this year. There's been lengthy discussions, pros and cons, a lot of community input. I've had several members of the community reach out to me over time in complete support of providing the full master plan funding plan to the voters in November, and then there have been others that have been concerned for different reasons or different issues. Taking that into consideration and honestly, following the guidance of our Parks and Recreation Advisory Board led by Chairperson Monica Segura, they recommended that we scale down the scope of the referendum to include simply the Coral Gables Youth Center. After discussions with the Administration and because of my knowledge with Parks and Rec, not only being involved with the Youth Center for my entire life, but also involved as the former chairperson of the Parks and Rec Advisory Board, I am of the opinion we take the resolution of the Parks and Rec Advisory Board and add to it Phillips Park because Phillips Park is an extension of the Youth Center. Phillips Park is one of the only other parks -- actually locations, assets in the City that we can program for children, families. And actually when the Coral Gables Youth Center -- if we're able to move forward and we have the positive vote in November from our residents -- when the Youth Center's under construction, we can move a lot of programming to Phillips. And Phillips -- quite honestly, one of the first years I coached was 1979, and Phillips Park 1979 looks a lot like Phillips Park 2022. Having said that, I welcome the Administration, to give some insight, some background, some information with regards to what is before us today in this resolution. Fred.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Thank you. We do have a quick presentation.

City Manager Iglesias: And let me say that we have the Parks Director and the Finance Director here presenting a brief presentation on the -- on just the Youth Center and Phillips Park component. We do have the other presentations available in case they're necessary to the Commission.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Thank you.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes, as we've discussed, we've been here several times. I think this is our fifth time talking about either the master plan or the referendum funding. So, what we wanted to do is look at -- based on the board's recommendation and the leadership that we got from the City Manager, we're looking at this new revision to the referendum ask. So, looking at Phillips Park and the Youth Center master plan, the number that we're looking at is \$60 million, which will cover escalation and the advanced cost of both of those two projects. Obviously, as we've spoken before, the required funds are not necessarily available within the current City budget, and a bond would provide a mechanism to obtain these funds. So, here is -- when we're looking at a \$60 million referendum item -- what the millage impact is, and here's the slide and Diana is here to discuss that.

Finance Director Gomez: Sure. Good afternoon. So, this is similar to the slides that we've shown in the past regarding the cost for doing a 20-year general obligation bond in the amount of \$60 million. It would be taken out all in one tranche, or one phase. We would take out the entire amount. Debt service on that \$60 million would be roughly \$4.2 million in order to generate that -- the tax revenues in order to cover that debt service. This schedule shows you based on the different types of home values, estimated home values, assessed values, what the increase to the tax would be for the life of the bonds. So, for instance, a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay about \$58 a year for the life of the 20-year bond to cover the debt on that \$60 million debt. And a home at \$750,000 would pay \$173 extra a year to cover that debt.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: So, as we presented in the past, there was a War Memorial Youth Center plan that was separate. There was a vision and it looked at (INAUDIBLE) the entire facility and all the different possibilities for programming, which included, you know, expansion of different facilities, creation of new facilities, improvements to facilities that we already had, whether it was the theater, the gym, the field space, adding extra floors, covering the

courtyard, a lot of different possibilities when you're looking at the Youth Center facility. With a comparison, we looked at and we presented to the Commission and to our advisory boards the, you know, comparison between renovation and addition. And you know, a renovation and addition will give you an expansion of facilities. It is a lower cost for a total project than a total demolition rebuild. And it would limit -- but it would limit programming options. There are certain things that you couldn't create. You couldn't create new items that you could with new construction. With new construction benefits, you have increased flexibility. The space that we have there does have some limitations based on the shape, based on the way it's constructed, based on other items with the infrastructure because a part of it is a little bit more -- from its original construction. We also have potential for aquatics here, you know, the lap swimming pool that the City doesn't have. If you have a complete new rebuild, you can build that into the project. There's a chance for the modernized infrastructure, which is more efficient, more sustainable, fire suppression systems, things that we don't necessarily have throughout the entire facility. And we're also able to consolidate the programming space into a single facility. Right now, if you know, it's kind of -- if you visit the Youth Center, it's a little bit disjointed. There's different areas that you can't access, and you'd be able to get a complete consolidated space. Obviously, there'd be a lot better pedestrian and vehicular circulation with a new one. But also what it'll bring is it'll bring exciting opportunities for programming. There's certain things that aren't in there that are now common usage for youth centers, whether it's, you know, walking indoor tracks, the aquatic space, more activity rooms, a bigger fitness space. There's a lot of different things that, you know, are now kind of commonplace in recreation that aren't necessarily in this building that we had. In addition to the Youth Center, we've talked about Phillips Park before at different Commission meetings, and this would provide for all of the renovations and enhancements that we need there. It would basically give us that park, which as you know, it is located in a high-density household area. It is, if not the most attended park, it is one of the top two. For most of its history it's probably been the highest attendance park. Salvadore might be beating it now because of the new construction, but it is incredibly used, and we have quite an age variety and use variety at that park. So, it would -- renovation enhancement would be great. Obviously, we'll be looking at doing -- expanding the

playground size. Right now, the footprint for the playground is not that big. Obviously, putting in a new play space, but expanding it and making it, you know, a wow type playground, similar to some of the stuff that we have in our other parks now, our newer constructions. We'd look at expanding the building and creating, you know, not only an office space to have that park be manned by staff at all times, but also to have a programming and community space and indoor restrooms which would provide for better safety, care, and protection against vandalism which would be great. We'd be looking at -- one of our big trouble spots there is anyone that knows athletic activity, we only have two athletic fields in the City, and one of them is the Youth Center space, and that is really guarded well for programming space. And if you go there today, that field looks great. Everybody else goes to Phillips Park, so the wear and tear on that field is really bad right now. And as Commissioner Menendez would know because he was on the advisory board for many years, I've been a proponent of putting artificial turf there probably 15 years, maybe more, because I know what the wear and tear is on that field. And now with the new technology you're able to do that. You're able to get something that's much cooler. The heat is not as big of an issue, and there's a lot of technological advances to have artificial turf. A splash pad is another item that we've talked about for many years. That would be another one that we'd look at putting in there, expanding the walking path and including a multipurpose path that'll have great grading and drainage improvements. If you're there, you know there are certain areas that are sloped, especially near the Publix building. Obviously, security and camera infrastructure, we would add, and we would refurbish the courts. We'd look at tennis courts and possibly the conversion of one of them into pickleball, as what is the trend right now. We would refurbish the pavilion. We would enhance the perimeter fencing, and we'd also do landscaping and landscape lighting. And it's important to note we'd also be going to the community, so all those things we'd be looking at, how we put them together, where we put them together, and what we add would be through community support. So, those are the things that we're looking at with these two projects. Here would be the next steps. They're similar to what we've talked about in previous meetings. Developing the message, we'd get an online public engagement tool to see how the public feels about it. We'd give them information. We'd schedule meetings with the community, and then

we'd establish a timeline with the allotted project costs. This is -- to get it on the ballot, the deadline to submit it is Friday, July 29th. That's the cost for the placement on the ballot. We do have the ability up to that amount to use our existing consultant to help us with the creation of the public engagement website and any of the community meetings, and we also have the use of our survey contractor, which that is of no-cost. So, that is our quick presentation. I know we've presented many times before, so I think we hit all the information.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you, Fred. Before I move on to my part, my discussion regarding the Youth Center, for those that don't know, Phillips Park, in the 1920s and 30s, actually had a football stadium there that players from the Chicago Bears with George Halas back in the day actually had football games there, probably UM at some point involved too. And we had the Coliseum, which at that time was the largest auditorium space in all of Dade County, 1920s and 30s. So, clearly, Georgia Merrick had that area pinpointed for community involvement, community activities. And if we can do work and bring Phillips Park up to speed in terms of what the community needs today, we'd be not only doing a service for our community, but also keeping in line with the vision of George Merrick. Now, with regards to the Youth Center, if the folks in the booth, if they could put up my Life Magazine image as part of my discussion. 1947, the first Coral Gables Youth Center was located at the Publix -- where Publix is on Le Jeune Road, right down the street. Life Magazine -- if you can switch the next image -- had an entire series on the Coral Gables Youth Center because there was nothing like it in the entire country, and it was dedicated to our veterans of World War II. And there are -- in the archives, there are letters from our soldiers stationed overseas responding -- not yet, go back -- overwhelmed with joy to see that their efforts fighting that war results in our youth, our community being able to enjoy the freedoms that they fought for. If you could move to the next image, please. That's the ground-breaking ceremony for the Youth Center at the location on Anastasia and University Drive, that's 1950s. That initiative was started door-to-door. We had community leaders, civic leaders knocking door-to-door throughout Coral Gables to get support to be able to build the 1950s Youth Center, and that's the ground-breaking ceremony. They actually had the community donate towards the

building of the facility, which you see right there in that middle image. You actually see the cardboard college in the upper left corner of that image. And that structure was there from the 1950s until the 1990s. Actually, those are my friends on the right-hand side. That's around 1971, baseball players at the Youth Center, the Rileys, the McCutchens. That facility served decades of children who are now parents and grandparents and pillars of our community. If you could move to the next slide, please. That's today's Youth Center built in the 1990s. The most interesting thing -- I get choked up -- 30 years ago, I was standing at that podium. I was a law student with blond hair and a lot more hair. And I was before the City Commission and the Planning and Zoning Board, not knowing much about government except where City Hall was located, speaking passionately about the needs, the necessities of our community and our children to have a youth center that provided the programming and the space that they needed. At that point, the Youth Center only had a football field, and there was an empty lot in between the library and the Youth Center field. And the City in its vision incorporated that empty lot. That's why we have so much space. Those are kids you see that play in our soccer program today. On the left hand side, you see one of the kindest counselors ever, Artie Centurion. But in the middle right there for those who grew up here at the Youth Center, that's Barbara Bine (phonetic). She passed away a few years ago. She spent over 50 years of her life dedicated to taking care and molding the lives of children who now today are parents and grandparents that look back to her. She was a life changer. She was the top woman athlete at the University of Miami headed to the Olympics, and she was in a car accident where a drunk driver hit her car and she was almost left quadriplegic. And instead of giving up on life, she dedicated the rest of her life to helping kids like me. So, as you can see, the Youth Center has a history of changing lives, that's why it's so important. Next slide, please. Cutler Bay recently had its voters in a referendum approve a town center, which includes a park, a place for kids and families. Cutler Bay did that recently. Their Commission approved it, and the voters went out and voted. If Cutler Bay can do it, Coral Gables can. There's -- it's interesting because when I spoke there that time, 30 years ago, we had people on the Commission, George Corrigan, Jim Barker, Bill Kerdyk, Senior, Bill Hildreth, Chip Withers, Raul Valdes-Fauli was key. They were leaders. They led the way. And we had opposition. We had people that quietly



were trying to undermine the efforts to create the new Youth Center because some of those people unfortunately wanted to see the money funneled to other projects. But at the end of the day, the community came together and spoke loudly. I know their concerns because the world is changing every single day. We have the atrocities happening at the hands of the Russian government, Putin. But you know what? We can't allow tyrants and dictators dictate to us how we're going to make decisions in life for our children and our grandchildren in our community. We're better than that. We're stronger than that. We're America, and we're Coral Gables. I was recently at an amazing - the best musical I've ever been to, and I was fortunate enough to be there with the Mayor opening night where he presented the key to the City to Gloria and Emilio Estefan. It was surreal to me to be there at that moment, and I thank the Mayor for bringing me up. And then I went back a couple of weeks later with my daughter who had just come down from college for spring break, and I took my wife, and there was something that was mentioned in that movie, a line, a quote that was so powerful. And it was the moment where Emilio Estefan and Gloria were in New York City in front of record executives asking for funding so that they could do their first album singing in English. And the record executive said, "No one wants that. Just keep doing what you're doing," and they stressed the importance and how the public would receive it, and they said, "It's not going to happen. We're not going to fund you." And then Emilio Estefan says, "Then we're going to let the people decide." And you know what? I'm not here to say to Emilio Estefan that he was wrong. Emilio Estefan was right, just like we all are right. That's what our country is about. That's our right, the right to vote. So, I say when it's time to vote that I'm going to say yes, and the people, our community should decide, not us, but the people should decide on the future of our community, the future of the Youth Center, the future of Phillips Park, and the future of their kids and grandkids. That's how I feel.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. Well said. Commissioners, what else would you like to discuss in regards to this issue that we have before us?

Commissioner Anderson: We have some -- any public comment? I think there are members...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk...

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Do we have some public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir, we do. First speaker...

Mayor Lago: How many public speakers?

City Clerk Urquia: Two.

Mayor Lago: Two? Please.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Mr. Samuel Lawson.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon. The floor is yours.

Samuel Lawson: So, this was a good morning. Now, it's good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Mr. Lawson: Good afternoon, Mayor Lago, Commissioners, Coral Gables staff members, and everyone present here and online. My name is Samuel Lawson, and this is my wife, Sasha. We live at 450 Camilo Avenue. We've lived there since 2013. Also, we have with us not here, but in support of us, 21 homes, and also the Christ Journey Church, Pastor White and Pastor Reid, and the congregation they represent. We refer to ourselves as the Youth Center community because

our properties directly abut and surround the Coral Gables Youth Center. We come here today to stand in opposition against the proposed tax referendum. Two things before I start. First, I haven't heard back from all 21 homes, but those that I have heard back from are definitely opposed and have added their particular concern and verbal flare, and I have received words of support from the church. Second, I'd like to really, really thank Mayor Lago and all the Commissioners for setting a culture in Coral Gables government that is so gracious and I believe sincerely intent on actually listening to the citizens and addressing our real concerns, and at times, being willing to pivot on a dime...

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Lawson: With zero hesitation. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Lawson: On this issue of the proposed tax referendum up for vote today, we oppose this for three reasons, which I will enumerate in reverse order of importance. So, number three, the least important, the proposal itself. So, first of all, in no offense to anyone on Coral Gables staff anywhere, and all the good people who work for Coral Gables, our wonderful neighbors and stewards, the proposal, in my opinion, in regard to the park development did not come with adequate information and assurance to justify \$1 million in spend, let alone \$160 million, or now \$60 million in spend, whatever it is. There should have been a complete list of deliverables, not bullets like that on a slide, but a complete list of the deliverables at a line item level by park with each of the projected cost numbers sorted in descending order on costs. And that should have been reviewed at a macro level using the 80/20 rule with the public. That should have been done. That wasn't done. That's my opinion. Also, a spend of this significance, in my opinion, \$60 million at this point should come with assurances from a third-party review like a Deloitte that shows an okay that the fiduciary responsibility of the City with taxpayer money on a project of this

proportion has in fact been met and as per the trusted reputation, they agree to it. This is tens of millions of dollars in a proposed tax that impacts all property owners for now I see 20 years. At first, I was confused. Was it 10 years? But clearly, it's 20 years. Okay, reason number two, priorities. While we love our parks and we love the City Beautiful, while we love our children, and while I think putting more effort and money into our parks is a sweetheart idea, we have other more significant priorities that must first be addressed, such as below ground electric. Our home at 450 Camilo was out of power in the last hurricane for over 30 days. I think that's because of a complication with the trees and et cetera, and our great canopy, and also because we were such a small headcount on our street as compared to the rest of the state that FP&L kind of sorted us to the bottom of the fix list, but over 30 days. Sidewalk improvements -- and this may actually be the most important thing that we could work on in my opinion. There are so many tripping hazards because of the trees and the branches that grow under the sidewalks. There are so many tripping hazards, people literally walk and jog on the streets to avoid them. Now, I don't know if I'm under oath, but I would glad to be under -- I'm glad to be under oath. My wife sitting over their jogs, and she has come home twice in the last 60 days with scratches on her wrists and her knees from falling while tripping over the sidewalks, okay.

Mayor Lago: May I interrupt you for one second, sir?

Mr. Lawson: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: What streets are these so that we can have our Public Works Department take a look at them immediately?

Mr. Lawson: So, I'll give you -- I'll circle back and email you back the actual paths that we take. But basically, we have so many trees that they basically knock up the sidewalk. We replaced the sidewalk in front of our house at our own cost because of that. Traffic calming, that's another priority. Now, Google, Waze, they short-cut people through our quiet streets when there's traffic

overload on the rest of the streets. You all know what I'm talking about. People use the app, they find the shortest -- the quickest route, and all of a sudden, you have random cars doing 45 miles an hour down your small street. So -- and these are just some of the basics. There are many other major infrastructure changes like electrification opportunities with the world racing to convert to electric. We need to walk before we run. Our parks, including the Youth Center, are currently beautiful as they are. As they are, they're beautiful. And we need to get some of these basics done first, so that's priorities. But reason number one, which to me is the most important of all and trumps the other two reasons, even if the other two reasons were valid -- I'm going to get on my soapbox on this, but friends -- and I say it as friends because no matter what side of the political line you're on, this is our country. It's our City, and we're a team, okay. So, I put this before you, we have lost our way as a country. Socialist ideas have invaded our culture, our processes, our schools. They've entangled themselves into our minds and our hearts in such a way that we mentally don't even detect it or emotionally have given up our strength to fight it. In the United States as a whole, we've conceded so much of our value system, and in my opinion, in some way, we've become a laughingstock on the world stage. As a Jew, we're getting ready to celebrate and observe the biblical commandment that's over 3,500 years of Passover, where God delivered us out of Egypt. Why? Because we were abused in Egypt. We were oppressed, and we suffered from tyranny. That's a true statement. All of us here have a similarly inherited DNA. We are either the offspring of those from the American Revolution, or we are the subsequent immigrants that have benefited from the fight they fought, and the deliverance and salvation that God gave to them, and the deliverance and salvation that God gives -- has given to all of us standing here today that live in this country. The idea of a new tax to fund some parks sounds so benign, doesn't it? It's just a little more tax, just some parks. But hidden here is a viper with fangs. This is not the way. And passing it off to voters who barely show up for a presidential election by burying it in some fine print on page five of a ballot, an off-election year ballot, doesn't make it okay. What happens to the less financially capable man or woman in Coral Gables that is working so hard and struggling to pay their mortgage, barely doing that with no time to educate themselves on City politics, or show up for some obscure voting on an off-year election? What happens when they

wake up to find a tax bill increase to be taken out of their personal bank account to pay for park upgrades that they don't even have time to visit? Is that fair? And the answer is no, it's cruel. We literally founded this country based on a revolution that was based on an event in Boston, where we felt so oppressed by unfair taxation imposed upon us by the British Parliament that we revolted and demanded freedom. Now, after that, we established a republic based on a 2 percent tax rate. When I was in college studying economics, we found that the average American was paying 43 percent of their income in tax when you consider income tax, property tax, sales tax, and all the other taxes, 43 percent, and that was over 20 years ago. Imagine what it is today. Are we paying over 50 percent in tax? We have been so misled by socialist ideas that we continue to impose new taxes on ourselves, we as a team. We strangle our economy and survive off loans from China to balance our budget. Is this who we've become. Thank God we have a Mayor in Coral Gables who believes in saving money and buying things with cash. My final statement, and I want to add because you made quite an emotional plea in regard to the Youth Center, and I feel like it was heartfelt, and I've had personal conversations with you, and I know you care about children and your history stands for that. But you said something in there that caught my attention. You said that when that Youth Center was originally paid for, it was paid for by private donation. Okay, not a tax. So, I call on the Commission today -- my final statement. I call on the Commission today to not only vote down this referendum, vote it down, but to also consider the following. As property values rise in Coral Gables, consider reducing the millage rate. So, if the property values rise 50 percent, reduce the millage rate 25 percent. You're still in the black. Make Coral Gables a haven for people who want to pay less taxes, like the State of Florida does, and watch how much more you accelerate development, accelerate property value appreciation, accelerate the local economy. Watch how those park upgrades come online through different means. Be the first -- I think maybe the first -- in the state of Florida to reduce taxes and watch how your tax revenue grows. Thank you very much. I genuinely appreciate the graciousness, and we love the Youth Center, and we love everything that you're calling for, but we're definitely opposed to tax.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for joining us. I appreciate your words.

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

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, welcome again. The floors is yours.

Maria Cruz: Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you a quick question?

Ms. Cruz: This is...

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you a quick question? I get confused.

Ms. Cruz: Yes.

Mayor Lago: I get confused. Is this --? I have to steal the Vice Mayor's line, I apologize. It's too good to not let it go. Is this the same Maria Cruz that's spoken already twice today? I just want to make sure. Is this the same Maria Cruz?

Ms. Cruz: This is...

Mayor Lago: Do you live near the Youth Center?

Ms. Cruz: This is -- no, I do not. This is the Maria Cruz that has said almost every time I speak that I'm not concentrating my efforts only what affects me, but what affects the whole City because I love this place. And I'm sorry that the previous person -- the previous previous, the one -- the attorney did not know who Maria Cruz was because I thought I was so famous already that I was shocked that he had to question whether I was the same Maria Cruz. Yes, the same Maria Cruz.

And I had something that I wanted to say, and this last gentleman that spoke really touched me. I do think that we need to address the issue with parks. I think that based on what we know today about how the prices have -- of homes have skyrocketed and how we're going to be getting more money than we did the last year and the year before that because of the prices, that maybe instead of going to referendum and ask the people to pay more taxes -- even though we do not know now based on \$60 million how much it will be because we haven't been told -- I think that you probably will be able to do it with the extra revenue that you're going to get from the new prices of the homes and the real estate. I think that you can consider that. Comment number two, you know, so we may have to wait a little bit, like we waited for City Hall, like we waited for some projects that have been waiting for a while. But it'd be worth waiting if you do not put more -- what the gentleman said, a heavier load on some of the people that cannot afford more taxes. And like I said before, I'm not talking for myself. I can I'm sure afford a little more, but there are people in this city that chose to live here, are retired now, living on pensions and social security, and we sometimes -- we're going to force them out of here if we keep adding stuff to them. That's one comment. The other one is a concern that I had when we did the workshop about the \$160 million referendum. The consultant that spoke very clearly stated that once your approve a referendum, the City has the flexibility to change what they do with the money. And that question came about because there was a long list of parks, and we wanted to make sure that everything that was on the list was going to happen. And she said, "No," you know, "there's ways that you can move it around." You know, if you spend more on one, you may not have enough for the whole list. So, my question is, do we know in what order we would do this if it were to pass? Is the Youth Center the first priority? Because I remember some discussion about putting the larger and the smaller projects in a different scale. And will Phillips Park for sure, sure, sure, a hundred percent sure will be improved, or after we do the Youth Center, if we do it first and we don't have money, then the Phillips Park will be changed? Those are my questions. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Cruz.



City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we have a member of the public with their arm -- hand raised on Zoom. I'm not sure what their name is so I'm going to go ahead and unmute them now.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, is this the last...

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Comment? Okay, please close the public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Will do.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Karelia Martinez Carbonell: Hello.

Mayor Lago: Hello. Can you please identify yourself?

Ms. Carbonell: Hi. This is -- yes, hi, everyone. This is Karelia Martinez Carbonell. And I live on 532 Altara Avenue. I do want to comment as a preservationist. I am also the President of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables, but this is a personal comment. As a preservationist and an advocate, I -- you know, with all due respect to Commissioner Menendez and I -- I'm on the phone, so I didn't see the presentation, but I did hear it about the old Youth Center. And you know, it's sad that, you know, that whole history, we weren't as a City able to preserve more of it, And I'm hesitant to really now consider another project that's going to be, you know, well over 60 million or 100 million. And again, I don't know if it's for a brand-new Youth Center, but it just seems that that footprint should have been preserved more than really just razing it and then building new. And that history we don't know. We don't know that history. So, I feel like, moving forward, the City needs to really take a look at how we preserve our history. We lost

the Coliseum. We've lost so many buildings right in that area just to make way for new development. And of course, the Youth Center is very important, but you know, the stewardship of our history I think needs to be preserved and thought through. And this was back in the '90s when we had our ordinance, we had -- you know, basically, I think the City should have preserved some aspect of that. So, again, I don't know if this is for a new Youth Center. I didn't hear the whole presentation. But you know, the Youth Center is -- looks good to me. And I think, you know, we can always adapt to whatever needs there is, or whether it's, you know, adaptive reuse or just renovating the structure. Tearing down and building again, it should really be a nonstarter at the point that we are in our environment and the issues that we're facing. So, as a preservationist, I would obviously have to know more about it. But you know, having a resolution to build a brand-new Youth Center should really be thought through and really think about stewarding our history moving forward. So, I thank you. This whole War Memorial, I understand, you know, it's a wonderful history. I think, you know, it needs to be preserved more than it has been. There's really not much communication about it. And I think -- and maybe I'm wrong -- but I believe those plaques are -- no one knows where those are when the new Youth Center was built. I could be wrong, and I hope I'm wrong, but please, please consider all that in the context of our history. So, thank you, and thank you for allowing me to speak. Have a good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Carbonell. Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may have, I guess, Fred and your team. Three points were mentioned in the public portion of this matter. One is -- well, let's go backwards. The plaque -- I don't re -- if I recall, somebody ran over one of the signs that we had on the fields memorializing its history, and I think that was communicated to a resident or two had inquired it. Is that the...?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah. And we're -- we are getting -- I think we got a replacement, and we're also working with -- actually working, hopefully with UM, to have an even better remembrance of the plaque with the bench also. We're working on that to see that.

Commissioner Menendez: And at the development meeting we had with UM, they're going to donate a bench...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: To also memorialize the history of UM at that site.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: Secondly, the last question will be the question that -- the statement that Maria Cruz needed clarification on in terms of what the funds can be used for and what they can't be used for. But before we get there, I recall when the 90s Youth Center was built, and it was basically new skin on old bones to a certain extent. That's why I would say 50 percent of the facilities there, you can't program. If you go to the Youth Center, it's a series of corridors and hallways. You could have a family of 10 on one side of the Youth Center, and a family of 10 on the other side of the Youth Center, and there's no connection, there's no involvement, there's no community. You have a lot of corridors. You have a lot of stairwells. You have a lot of dead space, but we have a community that's vibrant. You have young people coming into the community, and a Youth Center that, as your presentation showed, provides true flexibility, would basically set the stage for decades going forward that no matter what the taste or the desires of the programs that are popular at that time, you can adapt. Unfortunately, the structure that's there now, it's very pretty. And I've had discussions with staff. Back in the day, staff itself said they're not listening to us. They're making a pretty Youth Center, but not a real-world functional Youth Center. We've all been to places that are pretty, but at the end of the day, they don't function in the real world. That's the structure that's there today. So, could you please respond or Diana, respond to the issue of what can you do with those monies and what can you not do with those monies?

Finance Director Gomez: Sure. So, when bonds are issued, part of the bond documentation states clearly what is going to be done with those funds. In this particular case, if it's the Youth Center and Phillips Park, that is exactly what will be done. Should something come up, for example, you cannot do a certain portion of it because some kind of -- who knows? Either one, the money runs out because there's escalations and there wasn't enough funding, or something in the land that says you can't build there or something like that, obviously, if you can't do it, you cannot do it, but that doesn't mean you can take that money and use it for something else. Typically, if there's no other purpose identified in the bond or no other room to do something else with it, it is then used to pay down the debt. It's not used for something completely different. Should you have the master plan with the full 160 and maybe one particular piece that was listed cannot be done or you decide -- or the Commission decides to change it to something else, that information would have to come back to the Commission. It would have to be discussed at the Commission level. And if there's a project, a like project that was considered as part of the overall master plan, then it could be reallocated to that other like project. It cannot just not -- you know, be taken for something completely different or something that wasn't considered as part of the master plan. And if nothing else is there, then you use it to pay down the debt.

Commissioner Menendez: And the Youth Center that's there today, the structure that's there today, if I'm not mistaken, that was a loan, sunshine, I believe. Fred, you might recall a bit better than I.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: It was a Sunshine State loan.

Commissioner Menendez: The City borrowed the money for that.

Finance Director Gomez: Right, we borrowed the money for that.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes, the City borrowed the money for that.

Mayor Lago: And that loan has sunset or...?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, I think so because it was 1990 -- I mean, we took it out -- we opened the building in February of '97, so I think it has.

Finance Director Gomez: Yeah, I would think that -- I can double check that, but yes.

Mayor Lago: Can we double check on that?

Finance Director Gomez: I'm sure that...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Finance Director Gomez: That one has been paid off.

Commissioner Menendez: I had understood that it had been.

Finance Director Gomez: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: I'm just saying, can you imagine knocking down a building that we're still paying debt on to build another building on top?

Commissioner Menendez: I don't think that...

Mayor Lago: I mean, that would...

Finance Director Gomez: I -- yeah.

Mayor Lago: To me, that would be...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I don't think we are. I understood that it was paid off.

Finance Director Gomez: Um-hmm.

Commissioner Menendez: My understanding was it was paid off as well. In fact, I think the State closed down that program that it had back in the day.

Finance Director Gomez: So, it's not a State program. It's a Sunshine State Government Financing Commission...

Commissioner Menendez: Right.

Finance Director Gomez: Which is an organization that facilitates lending to local governments in the state of Florida. That -- I would -- I can double check really quickly to see if there's...

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

Finance Director Gomez: Anything outstanding on that one. I don't believe that there is.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah, I don't -- it's been a while.

Finance Director Gomez: But I can check that.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: The final answer was on -- in terms of Phillips versus the Youth Center.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: I mean, there's only two projects in this proposal. And Phillips Park is a smaller scale and would be quicker to start based on what's needed. So, I would think you'd probably get Phillips done before.

Commissioner Menendez: And that way when you go to the Youth Center and do the work there, you can move programming to the...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Well...

Commissioner Menendez: That would be...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: To Phillips Park.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes, that would be a great use.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Commissioner Menendez: Because we used -- back in the day, we moved programming to the Biltmore...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: But that annex building of the Biltmore is now office space.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, the conference center, yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: So...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: It's limited. So, Phillips Park would be the logical choice. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Fred. I appreciate that. So, fellow Commissioners, are there any other comments or discussion items in regards to this?

Commissioner Fors: I have a couple of initial thoughts. You know, I think for me it'd be a completely different conversation if we were talking about taking on the bond before a referendum. In my mind, I keep on leaning towards setting aside some of my concerns about a general obligation bond because we're talking about a referendum. We're forced frequently with the -- or forced upon us frequently is the task of getting up here and making difficult decisions and trying to figure out what the residents really want because that's what we were elected to carry out. We have to listen to testimony like this gentleman here saying that he's spoken to 21 houses, or he hasn't gone to all 21 houses -- I can't remember what he said -- and try to gauge how that represents the residents. Here, on the other hand, there's really no need to speculate, and what we're voting on, or what's being proposed here is to ask the residents how they feel about it. In a perfect world, we could run a referendum on every decision we made up here and we wouldn't -- our job wouldn't be that difficult. I also think it's -- I think it's a little dangerous to say that we can't count on the vote if the vote is not on a presidential year because our own elections aren't. So, I mean, where do you stop? Where do you draw the line there? Are our Commissioners not validly elected



because they don't go up for vote on presidential years? And in fact, I think this one would go up with the primaries, which would probably have a way larger turnout than our own Commission races. I also think that taxation is something that I'm also opposed to and raising taxes. But really, the problem with taxes for me is taxation without representation. Here we're asking the people if they would like to voluntarily take on an added assessment to their tax roll. With all that being said -- and by the way, on a side note, one important consideration here is that this would not affect our bond rating or affect our credit worthiness in any way, shape, or form. It'd be a direct assessment for these particular measures and improvements. With that being said, I'm glad to see that the proposal was reduced now to Phillips Park and the Youth Center. I think I would almost like to see it focused solely on the Youth Center, but I believe there's reasons for coupling them both. Is the reasons -- and I'll ask Fred. Is the reason for coupling these two that -- and I think Commissioner Menendez may have alluded to it -- that Phillips would serve as a temporary placement for Youth Center, or is it just because Phillips been on the to-do list for a long time?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah. I also think the way we want to construct it, it serves a satellite for the Youth Center, and it eases some of the use, especially in a high-density area. So, I think it's an important facility. It's probably our second biggest one. So, if you're looking at hitting the big ones...

Mayor Lago: A major scope.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Those are the two.

Commissioner Fors: Right. And I'll wait to hear from the rest of my Commissioners. Right now, I'm kind of torn between -- really between the fact that I think that if our decision we were making today was to do the bond, my vote would probably today be no. But I continue to remind myself that that's not really the vote, that the vote is really a referendum on whether we should do it or

not, so that's kind of what I'm torn between here. And I'll wait to hear from my other Commissioners, as well as the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your comments. Myself personally, I've -- I mean, I've stated over years, and I've voted against the garbage fees that have been passed through from the County, and I will continue to vote against those until we address the bigger issue that we have to address, which is the garbage pits. And we started addressing that with cardboard, and that was a big first step forward. And I commend staff and the City Manager for doing something that many people said we'd get thrown out of here for doing, and for removing the piles on 57th Avenue and 37th Avenue, and look, it's been a smooth transition. But we need to still address those issues, and I will continue to vote no on those pass throughs from the County. To me, I agree with Commissioner Fors on the issue of taxes. I will never raise taxes. I will cut to the bone before I raise taxes. And the reason why I say that is because I remember very clearly, my grandparents, when they came to this country, they didn't have a dollar to their name. My grandfather became a physician again in this country after being a doctor in Cuba, and they had such great pride when they lived on Minorca in a tiny little home that I drive by probably two or three times a week. Even though I don't need to go through that street, I still go to that street because it reminds me of my grandmother who took care of so many of my friends and myself. And I do it kind of like subconsciously, not even thinking that I'm going down that neighborhood, and I catch myself right in front of her house, who now has a young family living in it. They could barely afford to live in that house, barely. They're retired. They live on social security, and I remember their struggles. So, when you talk about \$100 here or \$200 there, it makes a difference. It makes a big difference, and sometimes we take that for granted. I think right now we're facing unprecedented times in regards to the current economic climate in the United States, and also, internationally, when you look at a war like we're facing right now. I think you're seeing inflation the highest it's been in 40 years and continuing to go up. You're seeing gas prices double. Thank God I have a fully electric car and solar panels on my house, but it's incredible. You see the news that people are spending 2, \$300 more a month. When you're include what they're spending on top of that in groceries,

what they're spending on top of it -- forthcoming FP&L hikes which are already in the books coming in 2023 and 2024, for people who are retired, if you had 5, \$600 of leeway, that gets gobbled up really, really, really quick, when you think about increases at the pump, at the food -- excuse me, at the grocery store, everything has gone up. And also, they're talking about now, over the last three days, about proposed new federal tax hikes. That's out of our control. So, everything is going up, the cost of living, proposed new tax hikes in the federal government. So, at this current moment, at this current moment, I just can't see myself voting for any tax increase, even though I agree with Commissioner Menendez. We need to do something -- we good, Mr. Clerk? Okay. I know that we need to do something in regards to Phillips Park, and I know that we need to do something in regards to the Youth Center. We all visit it frequently. I just can't at the current moment support a tax hike on the residents of the City. Because every time I consider that or I struggle with that, I talk to residents in this community, and I think about a lot of the individuals like my grandparents who lived in the North Gables, who lived in apartments, who lived in a very small home barely getting by but being so proudful that they live in the City Beautiful. So, today I will be voting no on this issue, but that -- Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: This has been one of the items I've spent the most time thinking about which way to look at because I love our parks, and I know how important it is to the formative years of youth in our community. I want to make sure that the next generation has wonderful parks to enjoy. And I have to thank our Parks and Recreation Department because, in addition to the facilities, it's the programming that you all provide that makes such a difference in our children's lives. It's like they're your children. I can see it in your eyes. And I've looked at the pros, and I've looked at the cons. Having the Youth Center updated and moving forward in the future is something that we always have to keep our eyes on. The project planning does take time, so even if this referendum is approved by the voters, it's going to take time to do the project planning to have the details in there really that voters I think deserve to see to know what they're voting for. The cons are considerable. Timing for this is not good for multiple reasons. In addition to the points that the Mayor has brought in, the cost of construction materials right now, as we all know,

is through the roof. Are we providing the right guidance for our community by saying now I the time to take this on? I don't think so. I looked at the -- what Cutler Bay did, and 17.5 percent of the individuals came out and voted; 3,340 residents decided for the rest of the community that they were going to pay a tax increase. I'm not willing to vote for a tax increase for our community, not at this time, not ever. We have an affluent community where we've had the increase not only of the existing values in homes -- now, I'll just pause there for a moment because Save Our Homes, even if the values decline, the people that are on limited incomes won't see the decline because it's going up 3 percent every year. So, they're going to be paying increased taxes even if property values go down, and those are the people that are on limited incomes that are going to be impacted the most. I came from a rather conservative set of parents that lived through the Depression and valued every single penny that they had and lived through some very difficult times when there wasn't food on the table with eight children in a family. If you didn't get your fair share fast enough -- and some of them were football players, so they ate a lot -- you lost out. We've talked about inflation. We haven't completed the payments yet on the Renaissance project. We have to keep that in mind as well. We have lots of other priorities, including electrification, but I want to make a note too that we have to still deal with the septic to sewer changeover and the connection issue for those people on limited incomes. And I'll pause there and note for you that the connection issue has been dealt with with other cities where grant programs had to be put in place to help out those that are on limited incomes to be able to pay for that connection. And not only is that expense going to be entailed, but they're going to be paying for additional fees for treatment of the sewage that they weren't dealing with in the past. So, we need to look to support those members of our community that are going to have difficulty in paying those types of costs. The traffic calming, the sidewalks, the streetscape projects right down the block here on Biltmore Way have been waiting for decades to happen as long as -- as well as the septic sewer that's going to be a heavy lift. I'm not willing to have 17.5 percent of the community decide for the rest that they're going to have to pay more. So, as a steward of the City's finances and looking out for the other members of our community, I unfortunately have to vote no on this.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Mena: Okay. So, I'm interpreting all of your comments as applying not only to the proposal by Commissioner Menendez that limits it, but also to, obviously, the broader -- because they're both on the agenda today.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, for what it's worth, a few comments. One is, you know, I don't necessarily agree with some of the comments about the taxation component to this. And you know, the gentleman that spoke was very respectful and I appreciate that. I think the tone of your comments was very appropriate, even though you were touching on, you know, topics that are difficult and that people can have disagreement on, so I appreciate your comments. I don't agree with sort of the implication that this is somehow part of like some socialist agenda creep. I get the point, but I don't agree here. You know, you invoked the American Revolution. You know, American Revolution wasn't just about taxation. It was actually about taxation without representation, and here there is representation, and I couldn't think of something more representative than a referendum item. And I don't necessarily -- I appreciate the comments by Commissioner Anderson, but I don't necessarily agree that just because a certain percentage of the population only votes in a referendum, when you make a decision not to vote, you make that decision. So, 100 percent of the community will have an opportunity to vote. This community has varying degrees of participation. There will be more participation in a November ballot. That's why we wanted it on a November ballot because you get more participation than you do in our elections, which occur in April. So, that's just a general proposition. Here's my issue right now. I have a couple of issues, and there's -- we're not all on the same page on this topic for sure because it's a very involved topic, and you know, that can complicate things. For me, the Youth Center is not my number one priority on the list of priorities in the Park Master Plan. Obviously, they're very important to our park system. It's critical, tremendous service. I agree with everything

Commissioner Menendez said about it. But just from a perspective of allocating significant dollars, my thing coming in here -- and I've pushed and fought to improve our parks system as much as I can within the confines of our budget obviously -- has been to try to elevate the rest of our park system around the Youth Center. And so, if I were going to split up the things that are in the \$160 million original master plan concept, I would almost take the Youth Center out before I made it the only thing that's included. So, we have a little bit of a difference of opinion there. But again, I think we're all coming from the same place. It's just a matter of how you prioritize these things. My bigger concern is what we just experienced or are currently experiencing with the mobility hub. And I have real concerns about even the numbers that we're using, not because there hasn't been a good faith effort to come up with reasonable numbers, but because numbers are changing drastically right now. And so -- I mean, we just voted on a mobility hub not too long ago at a number that is significantly less than what we believe it will now cost a couple months later. And to tell the voters, approve a referendum for 60 million and we can do all these things, I have concerns about whether we can do all those things, whether we can knock down and rebuild an entire Youth Center and do everything that has to happen at Phillips Park with the uncertainty that we have right now in the construction industry, the cost of labor, et cetera. So, from a timing perspective, you know, this is unfortunate. So, that's where I'm having challenges. I would be willing to -- to Commissioner Fors' comments, I'm of the mindset that I'm not imposing a tax. I'm not voting to impose a tax. I'm voting to allow the residents vote on a referendum, and I'm comfortable doing that. But I have to be comfortable with what I am proposing on the referendum and the ability of the City to then deliver on what residents are approving in that referendum. And I have full faith in our staff to deliver, but there's just a lot of uncertainty in terms of the cost right now that to me is really troubling and makes me a little uncomfortable right now. And here's my other problem where, if I'm being honest, we're rushing a little bit, and we're rushing because of the goal of getting it on the November ballot. And I appreciate that, and at the outset of the process, I was on board with that approach so (INAUDIBLE). But where we are today, in March -- and the timeline keeps getting shorter and we still have a lot of questions about how to prioritize these things and what number to go out with. I'm just not comfortable right now. So, I can tell you with

certainty, I don't, respectfully, love the idea of just breaking off the Youth Center and Phillips Park. I would be comfortable with going forward with a referendum on parks, but I'm not comfortable with the current plan as proposed. And so, I'm happy to keep working on it. I don't know that we can meet the November deadline, and I appreciate that, I get it. But I'm not -- to be very clear, I'm not advocating, you know, tossing the plan in the garbage and, you know, not continuing this discussion. I'm absolutely on board with that. But I just think we need to flesh out in today's construction industry and with what -- maybe wait a few months, see what things look like, you know, and do this at the right time that makes sense and with a little more clarity -- I don't want to say more clarity because we hired consultants. We did a master plan. I'm not, you know -- but we need to give people more certainty that we can deliver because I won't be part of a referendum where we say we're going to do ten things and we only get to seven or eight of them. Because you're going to get people voting for things because, you know, they want -- maybe they only care about the park on the corner of their house. They don't really care about, you know, the park across town, but they're supporting it for that reason. So, you know, it's a long-winded way of me saying right now I'm not willing to support either of the items as drafted. I would be willing to support a referendum item that prioritizes Phillips Park, Salvadore Park -- or Salvadore Park, we already did a lot, but there's some more that needs to be done, obviously. Kerdyk and -- not Riviera...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Jaycee.

Vice Mayor Mena: Thank you. And Jaycee Park. To me, those four parks, if they could be elevated to a higher level of quality and service -- and we've done a lot of good things within each park already, but really kind of step it up and take them to the next level, Phillips Park in particular. I do agree with having Phillips Park for sure. I think we could do that and really elevate the entire park system. I think the Youth Center is not as bad as some make it out to be in terms of what it lacks. I know it could be -- obviously, if you built a new one today, it would, you know, be by today's standards and be excellent and be different. But I think it also does a lot of great things and it serves a lot of needs for the community, and it's fantastic in a lot of ways, and Parks does a



great job with it. So, that's where I am. So, I'm personally a no vote today, but it's not lip service when I'm saying that I want to continue meeting with Parks and keep working towards the eventual goal of how to approach this and supporting a referendum item. I am supportive of going out with a referendum, just not with how it's set forth on the agenda today at the costs and in the economic conditions that we are in today. That's where I am.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Vice Mayor. Commissioner Menendez, how would you like to move forward as the sponsor of the item?

Commissioner Menendez: I just have one question, then I'll make my statement. For the Vice Mayor, if not the November -- let's say everything fell into place where, for example, you were comfortable, and others were comfortable. If not the November ballot, when do you foresee it being -- realistically being able to come before the voters? Because I know we have local elections in April of 2023, which adds yet another layer of intrigue into the process. So, you're saying perhaps November or fall next year, presidential election? I mean, not presidential...

Vice Mayor Mena: It's two years.

Commissioner Menendez: Two years.

Mayor Lago: Two years.

Commissioner Menendez: But as the November 22 -- I'm just trying to get a sense as -- in terms of timeframe whatever is -- you know, to understand what you are comfortable with and perhaps the others are. Because my biggest concern is that -- and I understand, and I respect everybody's thoughts and comments. And I agree with many of the things that were said. But like everything else, I just don't want it to be pushed into the abyss...



Vice Mayor Mena: Agreed.

Commissioner Menendez: Never to come back. So, I'm asking for some guidance.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, one of the -- to be able to answer that question, one of the questions that I had, Fred, is the dollar figures you're using. And I think I've asked you this before but remind me. The dollar figures that you're using for, let's say the Youth Center, when were those estimates made?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Well, those estimates -- we started the process two years ago, but we did have in the plan -- there were certain percentages for escalation. So, for instance, you know, when we look at the monies that we have today, those -- they take into account some raising of prices because we know that there's an escalation, and it's probably about 20 percent is what we were looking at.

Vice Mayor Mena: But I mean, how does --? You know, again, using the experience with the mobility hub as an example, as a recent example, you know, I assume that that had in it as well some consideration of some wiggle room in terms of increased cost, but yet, you know, the market has far surpassed any such estimates.

Mayor Lago: Well, Mr. Manager -- Vice Mayor, usually in construction, we have like a five or a...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: Ten percent contingency. I mean, we're blown out of the water now. We're talking about some projects are 50 percent...

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: 60 percent.

City Manager Iglesias: We're way beyond inflation right now.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: Way beyond inflation.

Mayor Lago: Way beyond.

Vice Mayor Mena: There's price gouging, there's everything.

Mayor Lago: There's everything.

City Manager Iglesias: Everything.

Mayor Lago: It's a mix of inflation, price gouging, a litany of different things. Like you mentioned before -- something I didn't expect you to catch on, but you caught onto something very interesting, which we're seeing on a daily basis -- it's no longer products or the product chain or deliverables. Now, it's labor. You know, labor is holding projects hostage because there's so much work on the street that people are not giving you enough employees to actually finish work, so projects are taking longer as a result of -- you may have the products, but you don't have the labor.

Vice Mayor Mena: So, I understand you accounted for some escalation, but when -- my question remains, the actual number you're using -- what's the total number for the Youth Center?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: It was 42 million is what the number was.

Vice Mayor Mena: And when was it 42 million?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: It was two years ago most likely.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: So, that was the estimate with 42, whereas, you know, Phillips, we were looking at closer to eight, so it's 50.

Vice Mayor Mena: And who prepared --? So, you're saying you're adding an extra ten?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah. That's the escalation.

Vice Mayor Mena: Got it, okay.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: We're trying to...

Vice Mayor Mena: No, no, I get it. Yeah, yeah. And who prepared the original estimate? That was the consultant that did...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: That was the consultant.

Vice Mayor Mena: The master plan?

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: That was AECOM, yes.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yeah, I think, look, we just -- I'm trying to get to answering your question the best I can.

Commissioner Menendez: I know it's not easy, trust me.

Vice Mayor Mena: Because it is a moving target.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, it is.

Vice Mayor Mena: You know, I can only answer for myself, which is I need to -- I want to meet with Parks staff and work through other ways that we might be able to...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Sure.

Vice Mayor Mena: Prioritize projects. And you know, I think we have to be prepared to get more detail and get more specificity and then decide when -- what ballet you go for -- you know what I mean? -- is the short answer.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: That's fair.

Vice Mayor Mena: I would say no later than that November.

Commissioner Menendez: The election.

Vice Mayor Mena: And no later...

Commissioner Menendez: Because even if it...

Vice Mayor Mena: Even if you consider one of the interim Coral Gables elections, that's an open question.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm open to it only because I think, as staff explained to me, even if it passes the referendum, there's planning, a whole bunch of planning goes involved, so you're not even breaking ground for two years.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, you can't start construction. You still have to go through the whole process. And our City process is an established process where we go off for public input a couple of times. We make sure that, you know, we have a designer in place, so it takes some time.

Commissioner Menendez: So, every year that goes by, the 10-year-old today will be shaving by the time...

Unidentified Speaker: Yeah.

Commissioner Menendez: We have a new Youth Center, and that's my concern that we're missing a generation of kids today that can enjoy, you know, facilities that they deserve. So, that's my concern is like everything else in the political arena, if you don't manage it, it sort of gets away and you never see it again, so that's my concern. And to answer the question, why the Youth Center, well, the Parks Advisory Board, they recommended actually the Youth Center.

Vice Mayor Mena: No, I understand.

Commissioner Menendez: And when I spoke to folks in the community, you know, amazing people, a lot of prominent people, they were concerned about the bigger picture, the bigger master plan. But they said, "But we're okay with the Youth Center." It kept on coming back. So, as a

recurring theme, I thought, "Well, let's have it." But we've had a healthy discussion, and that's what Coral Gables is about. And I respect and admire and appreciate everyone's comments. And you all know where my heart is, but my heart will still be here whenever it's time to get this done. So, what I'm going to do, Mayor, is defer the item to no time certain to address the questions that were raised during the discussion, but that's why.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, you are the consummate gentleman, and I commend you for that.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: The sponsor has spoken, and we move forward. And we'll have staff...

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: We'll keep working.

Mayor Lago: Speak with the Commissioners that have additional questions, and I look forward to having it back on the Commission.

Parks and Recreation Director Couceyro: Yeah, sure.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you to staff for doing a wonderful job. You guys deserve all the credit and working with Commissioner Menendez. This is not the last time we'll hear of this, and I look forward to hearing it again, okay. It is 2 o'clock. I know we have a time certain 1 o'clock. Would my colleagues like to take a 15-minute break just to have something to eat and be right back? Is that okay? I know people have been waiting.

Vice Mayor Mena: Fifteen minutes.

Mayor Lago: I'd like to have a clear head when we talk about the next issue. Thank you. Fifteen minutes, so we'll be back at 2:20.