

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-5
January 13, 2026
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

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

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Mayor Don Slesnick

Agenda Item D-5 [Start: 10:34 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission expressing its desire to reactivate the Sister City relationship with the City of La Antigua, Guatemala.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, item D-5 is a Resolution of the City Commission expressing its desire to reactivate the Sister City relationship with the City of La Antigua, Guatemala. Since I've been blessed to be a Commissioner or Mayor, I've never taken one trip on the city dime. I've never gone to any foreign country. I've never spent one dollar of the city dollars since we talked about being fiscally responsible. Again, I have no issues with other people doing that. That's perfectly fine, but me personally, I will not do that. I bring that up because as we expand, I know what the next comments will be. There is some objective from the Mayor. That's not the case. This is a beautiful city. I think it served us well in the past and I ask my colleagues to engage in the Sister Cities Program. Mayor Valdes-Fauli spent years working on this, along with previous mayors, and it has served us well, because we've been able to donate to these wonderful cities and we've also been able to learn from them, as they've been able to learn from us. We have so much to be grateful

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for, so much to thank God for, that it's an opportunity for us to continue giving back. So, I would love for my colleagues when we have the members of our future Sister City once again, Antigua that are here in Guatemala or be coming soon, I'd like for you to meet with them, have a conversation with them. See how we can really expand on this brotherhood and sisterhood, I think it's important, a great opportunity, not only for them, but it's really a wonderful opportunity for us. So that's what I wanted to put on the record. Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor. I think, absolutely Mr. Mayor, and I think we need to – one of the things that I met with, I guess our International Affairs Coordinating Council last year, and one of the things that I asked them to do was, find ways where we can engage our Sister Cities to ensure that these partnerships are being beneficial to Coral Gables residents, our Coral Gables community, our Coral Gables businesses, and also the businesses and the residents of our Sister Cities. I think the Sister Cities Program can be extremely beneficial, but there needs to be an activation of these partnerships. It can't be something where we become a Sister City and then we just never hear from that Sister City again. It was very refreshing to see Aix-en-Provence here last year. I think that it was a very beneficial visit for them to see what Coral Gables was and find ways where we can engage, for them to meet with our business community here in Coral Gables with the members of the Commission and have that exchange of ideas. I think the Sister Cities Program can have a lot to offer, but as you said Mr. Mayor, we need to have more of an engagement in it. It's not just about, hey, we have a Sister City. It's about how can we benefit mutually from that partnership, and I welcome Antigua Guatemala coming back on board and reengaging, but I know that we have some that we haven't been able to hear from in years as well. So, we need to find ways to communicate with them and ensure that that partnership remains alive and fruitful for Coral Gables community.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Commissioner.

Commissioner Lara: Yes, through the Mayor. So, I agree with you, and I agree with Commissioner Fernandez as well. I think that overall, since you touched upon the subject of La Antigua, right, is that we need to have clear objectives Mayor, of what it is that we are trying to achieve with the Sister City Program, economic, cultural, or educational goals need to be mapped out, so that we can establish metrics to reach to make it all occur, active programs, right. Sounds like you had former Mayor Valdes-Fauli engaged, right. I remember former Mayor Don Slesnick also actively engaged with the Sister City Program in the past. I think there is a lot for the city to gain. I think there is a lot for the Sister Cities to gain as well, and it is yet another hallmark of how unique Coral Gables is, especially our ties to Latin America, among others. So, I stand behind that 100 percent. I'm going to commit some time to figuring out maybe some suggestions to share with my colleagues to how we can make it more active and I'll take up your call to action.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate that.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll just add to that. The proposal that you had and you engaged in where Sister Cities could bring in, with assistance from the city cultural events, I think really broadens the horizons of residents in our city to be able to experience some of the culture so that we don't live within our own little vacuum of places.

Mayor Lago: We have a treat. We have a treat today. We have our Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Our Pre-eminent, the person most active right now.

Mayor Don Slesnick: Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, just let me add to what you all have said and that is, and especially about La Antigua. I was proud to have led a delegation of 25 people to La Antigua and then you'll find in the archives of the city, virtual, I mean not virtual, but a film about our visit there and then La Antigua came here. And also, I'm not sure, I haven't seen the report, but also this city gave La Antigua a firetruck and the funny story behind that is that it was a retired firetruck that could no longer be used, and so, we were figuring out how do we ship it to La Antigua. They came here and drove it, drove it from here all the way around the Gulf and down through Mexico to La Antigua. So, the retired firetruck that couldn't stay in service drove from here to La Antigua. It's a great city. I urge you all to visit it. It's a beautiful, beautiful city. It will remind you of the kind of city beautiful that we are ourselves. So, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners, I really support what you're doing.

Mayor Lago: Don't move because you're up next. We are going to take a five-minute break, but I want to add to that. I want to thank the Mayor for always being a wealth of knowledge and resources. He always is a phone call away or a coffee away. I'm happy you told that story, because you told me that story. I didn't know what we were getting ourselves into. There is something very interesting inside that story and that is that, we have certain levels of standards that other nations, especially in south and central America don't – use standards, protocols where the life expectancy of a vehicle or an apparatus, as we were talking with the firefighters before, one of the gentlemen who was honored mentioned the fact that we give them the resources to be able to have worldclass items so that they can serve this community. Those products are still great, and head and shoulders better than some countries have. When you see when we were able to give them that firetruck and that was when Jim Cason was here, I remember when we gave that firetruck, it was like as if it was Christmas all over again. It was the best firetruck in the entire fleet. They were ecstatic. They went to all lengths to get it home and you saw what they were capable of doing. Like I mentioned before, before the Mayor stood up here. Yes, it's great to have a Sister City, yes, we can learn a lot, but at the end of the day, we have so much to give and what are we going to do? – We are

going to sell something for scrap, when at the end of the day you can give it to a community, and they can benefit from it immensely.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor. One of the things that I had spoken to Elvis at the Museum about was the potential – we have a Sister Cities room in the museum and the potential of having our Sister Cities maybe engaged in a quarterly presentation where that room can be dedicated to one of our Sister Cities and they can promote their Sister City, talking about their culture, talking about their business, and it could be an exhibit that can change quarterly exhibiting our Sister Cities. We have several Sister Cities, so this is something that could take a couple of years to basically promote our different Sister Cities, but it's a resource that we would have there and its something that can help promote as well the museum, bring in a different interest to the museum and a room that's currently not really being overly utilized, but it will provide for something that we can showcase our Sister Cities and the partnerships that we have as a city.

Mayor Lago: So why don't we do this Commissioner. Why don't you, maybe now at the next Commission meeting, whenever you feel comfortable, you bring back a proposal with an idea of how we can accomplish something of that measure and I'm more than willing to, not only entertain it, but I think it would be a great opportunity to continue to showcase our Sister Cities, because remember, Belkys will tell you and the Manager will tell you, when we are having conversations with countries that are considering putting their Consulates here in the City of Coral Gables, this is just another feather in our cap, we can say, look what we do, look at our relationships and look who we are when it comes to Sister Cities. It's incredibly beneficial. One of the countries that I thought would be great and I've had conversations with their Ambassador is to have a Sister City relationship in Israel and we've been having conversations in regards to that matter and I hope that in January of 2026, I'll be able to finally bring something here or you, the Commission will bring something here of ideas. We are looking at again, cities that are in line with our vision, like what Mayor Slesnick said. When you study a little bit about La Antigua you'll understand, the city is in line with who we are on many, many different fronts, many different fronts. So, I'd like to hear more about that at the next Commission meeting or the following whenever you are ready.

Commissioner Fernandez: And you are absolutely right, Mr. Mayor. I think one of the times when you talk to people internationally about Coral Gables, you talk about the Fortune 500 companies that are in the city that draw some interest. When you start talking about Consulates that are making their home in the City of Coral Gables that piques their interest. That's really something that is a feather in our cap and something that we can highlight. So, I'll meet with Belkys and the Manager and try to find a way, and Elvis at the Museum and see how we can get that plan and I'll bring it back in an upcoming meeting.

Mayor Lago: I love it. Perfect. Next item time certain for 10:30, but I want to just take...

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Before you proceed, can we please have a motion and a vote on D-5 please.

Mayor Lago: I'm sorry, I thought we had done that already.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Lara: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes