

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Items D-1, D-2, D-3
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

Development Services Director, Suramy Cabrera

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Items D-1, D-2, D-3 [Start: 5:35 p.m.]

Mayor's Comments

D-1: Discussion regarding the house on the corner of Bird Road and 57th Avenue.

D-2: Discussion regarding parking medallions.

D-3: Discussion regarding 827 Ortega Avenue.

Mayor Lago: D-1. Madam City Attorney can just give us a really brief 30-seconds update in regard to the property on the corner of Bird Road and 57th Avenue which is continuous to be full of trash. The fence is blown in and there seems to be no relief in regard to that property, which again is not inhabited by the owner, its rented out, and it just continues to be an eyesore in the neighborhood.

City Attorney Ramos: Ms. Cabrera and the Deputy City Attorney can come up and state when the property was cited and when they have to comply by.

Deputy City Attorney Suarez: Its my understanding that a notice of violation was issued. It went to the Code Enforcement Board, an order was entered, they had 30 days to comply. That deadline has lapsed, and I know that Code is just going to proceed with its process, which would include, you know, the running of fines and proceeding with the lien. But I do believe that Code has made

City Commission Meeting

March 29, 2022

contact with the owner, is my understanding, and that they said they were, I don't know the specifics, but they are working on it, is my understanding.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Right. They are working on cleaning it up, but the running fines did start, so the next step would be the recording of the lien.

Mayor Lago: Okay. I drive by that property every single day. I have to listen to the residents who tell me what an eyesore it is. That property should have been purchased by the city when we had the opportunity. The previous City Manager erred, and, in my opinion, it was a big mistake, could have been a beautiful entrance way for the city, and it was a shame that we missed out on that opportunity. And now we have to deal with the property, which is rented out and the grass is overgrown, the trees are overgrown, there are heaps of garbage in the front driveway, and right now you have a fence which is completely mangled and there is garbage thrown throughout the swale. I want to be careful with my words and what I have to say right now, but it's disappointing the level of, the fact that our hands are so tied in regard to allowing this to happen in our own backyard, especially in the City of Coral Gables. The residents are so fed up about this in my neighborhood, they are just tired of seeing this. They are tired of the lack of any ability to have any recourse on these individuals, especially since this property is a rented property, its owned by somebody that probably doesn't even live in the neighborhood or live in the county. So, I know you are trying to do the best that you can. I just ask you that when they do come back for a break on the code enforcement violations which are rolling, that we take a long and hard look in regard to the current state of that property, and how long it took them to fix the property, because the last time I checked they said they were waiting for reimbursement from the insurance company. We had that conversation. That privilege is not afforded to anybody here in the city. If you are waiting for the insurance company to pay for it, you fix it and then you get reimbursed. You can't just allow something to be out there for months devaluing your neighbor's property and being an eyesore in the neighborhood. So, I want to thank you for your hard work. I know its not your fault. I just want to make sure; we are getting to a level of frustration in the neighborhood that I'm going to – I don't know what else to do in regard to the property. But thank you.

D-2: I put this on the agenda, and I sent a memo to my colleagues in regard to parking medallions. I did this because I think that we need to have a new protocol; and the new protocol should be one that the Manager has a little bit more control over. And what I'm requesting is that, once an employee has a parking medallion, obviously no longer works here, the medallion is removed, correct. But for example, an elected official like myself, we should every two years have to show proof of life to make sure that those medallions are still being used by the individuals that those medallions were afforded. And we also need to be very careful, the amount of medallions that we hand out to people. In my household we have two medallions, not three, not four, not five, not six, not seven, two medallions. If we have out that somebody is deceased, someone has died, and they are a previous elected official, please do not continue to grant those medallions. That is a privilege for serving the city, and I want to make sure and I would like for my Commission to consider that there be a new process that once you no longer serve that you have every two years, the city can send you a notice and say, Mayor Lago, Vice Mayor Mena, please fill out this document, give us your license plate number, your insurance or whatever it may be and we'll send you your medallion or we'll update the system. We should get rid of medallions altogether, because medallions are

City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022

stolen. My medallion was stolen off my car and I know other elected officials whose had their medallions stolen from them. It should be uploaded to a system, a database and that's how people should know whether they get a ticket or don't get a ticket. So, if you consider that, I'm going to prepare some legislation to give a little bit more oversight to the Manager in regard to medallions.

City Attorney Ramos: Mayor, I think my recollection is that was done by Commission resolution, so we'll dig it up. It was a long time ago and we'll work with you to put together a policy.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Fors: I think you bring up a good point about the medallions physically being...

Mayor Lago: Obsolete.

Commissioner Fors: You can make one. I know they have a serial number. They are the standard stickers from Home Depot.

Parking Director Kinney: You're giving our state secrets away.

[Laughter]

Parking Director Kinney: What I can tell you is, the Mayor mentioned that and I agree completely that getting away from the medallions is probably the best thing. City employees currently that get free parking with the exception of directors. Directors are given a medallion because they've always been given a medallion, but for example, other employees such as assistant directors that have to drive their own personal vehicles for business, their license plates are just registered in the system. When we enter their license plate it shows this is an exempt person, 8 to 5. That means during the working day they don't get citations. That type of system can work for almost everybody and the City Attorney is correct. The resolution that we currently operate under is something that has been in place since early 80's and its probably time to rethink how we do that. I will tell you, the current list city employees past, elected and appointed people is about 84 license plate numbers, but the Mayor is exactly correct. There are certain people on that list that probably have more than their fair share.

Mayor Lago: To your credit, you have purged the list, on multiple occasions at my request.

Parking Director Kinney: I confess that we had deceased people on the list, but reading the obituaries is not one of my favorite things to do.

Mayor Lago: The way that you clean that up and you hold us accountable is by having a two-year window where that elected official has to contact the City Manager and submit a document saying, look, this is my car, this is my license plate number and I hope all is well, and that way you can ensure that we are being transparent and those medallions are being used for the appropriate purpose.

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

Commissioner Menendez: So dead people voted in Miami, and we have dead people driving with medallions.

Mayor Lago: Yes sir. Yes sir. Madam City Attorney can we prepare something for the next Commission meeting.

City Attorney Ramos: Yes, we'll work with you on it, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. D-3, and update in regard to 827 Ortega. What is the latest news in regard to 827 Ortega?

Deputy City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, this property has gone to the Construction Regulation Board a number of times and before the Code Enforcement Board. The owner agreed to an order, which has certain deadlines in it. The owner is working on revising the plans. The owner has been in, the current owner who acquired the property one year ago, has been very responsive to our outside counsel who is monitoring this case; and has stated that the structural engineer has to work on completing the calculations to submit the plans, etc., or to complete the plans. The next deadline is April 15th which requires a detailed update, but as I said, the owner is constantly updating counsel. And then, he does, he says he does plan to obtain the permits by the deadline of May 16th.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So quick question. A question for both of you, maybe Mr. Trias can give a little bit of insight if he looked at the plans. Has anybody here looked at the plans? The plans that he submitted – the exterior look of the plans, has anyone seen them?

Development Services Director Cabrera: I believe that the ones that you are referring to were the ones that were denied and they've changed their architect after that.

Mayor Lago: Let me tell you what was submitted. What was submitted in a residential neighborhood was submitted a property that went from corner to corner, I don't even think there must have been 3 or 4 percent green space, and it literally looked like it was a three-story building. It looked like an office building, am I wrong, Ms. Cabrera?

Development Services Director Cabrera: Like I said, those were rejected.

Mayor Lago: My point is that this individual hired an architect that was not aware of our standards. During that time that property was in a dilapidated state and continue to be an eyesore in the community. If the person is serious about embarking on a rebuild or a beautification project of this home, he would have hired a local architect that was aware of the code, a person who understood our standards, understood that we have a BOA, but that was not the case. This is an investment property for this individual and they want to maximize every square footage, which they are allowed to under our code, but what they need to do is make sure that they follow the code which they are not doing. So, on April 15th, Mr. Clerk, when is our next Commission meeting?

City Clerk Urquia: April 12th.

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

Mayor Lago: When is the next meeting after that?

City Clerk Urquia: The 26th.

Mayor Lago: On that Commission meeting, please, I want an update for 827 Ortega, and I'd like to understand where the project is at that moment. I get calls on a daily basis in regard to the residents in this neighborhood. Nobody should be subjected to live next to a home that is in this state. This is unacceptable, in my opinion, and after I saw the first plans, anybody who has an understanding about construction knows that this individual is not serious about rebuilding this home. I'm not sure what exactly they are doing. So, by April 15th they should have some sort of conceptual drawing at a minimum to present to the BOA, in regard to what their plans are, and hopefully we can push it forward. If I don't see something serious, I would really appreciate the support of my colleagues to take some legal action against these individuals, especially its my understanding that the owners are from out of town also. I know that our hands are tied until April 15th, but I don't want to be more accommodating than we've been already, especially with the current state of the home. Okay.

City Attorney Ramos: So, I think I heard May 15th was the agreed order deadline.

Deputy City Attorney Suarez: Right. April 15th is just to provide an update.

City Attorney Ramos: Okay. We are happy to do that, but I just want to let you know that Code Enforcement is a legal action and Construction Regulation is also a legal action.

Mayor Lago: How many months have we been dealing with this ordeal already.

City Attorney Ramos: I think a year...

Deputy City Attorney Suarez: I don't know exactly when the plans were submitted, but I believe that they were rejected in December.

Mayor Lago: This is what I would like Mr. Clerk, please. I would like a detailed breakdown, a schedule of the moment this house burned down to the moment that the house was sold.

Development Services Director Cabrera: We provided that already.

City Attorney Ramos: We sent that to you Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I want it on the record.

Deputy City Attorney Suarez: I can provide you that information.

Mayor Lago: I want to know when the first plans were submitted, when the architect was changed to the late, I don't remember off the top of my head, I get hundreds of e-mails a day and I apologize. I know it was sent to me. I try to respond to every single one. I want to build a timeline, because I
City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022

think that we're being too generous with this individual, and I think that if one of us lived next to this home you would want to have someone like myself pushing for less generosity. I'll leave it at that. Okay. So, the April 26th meeting, I look forward to that update. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: I have a few more items. Today our State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle was holding a press conference to bring attention to insidious crime that takes place in our community and around the globe, sex trafficking. As part of our announcement, she is promoting the local hotline that is available to report sex trafficking or to obtain resources for victims of trafficking. The hotline is 305-FIX-STOP. As part of this campaign, they have created partnerships with private industry and will be training personnel in the five industries that will most likely encounter victims – hotels, restaurants, airports, seaports, and law enforcement. This training is geared so that people can identify and learn the signs of when people are being trafficked so it can be reported. As part of this effort, the State Attorney has partnered with local, state and federal agencies and other municipalities in Miami-Dade County, like Coral Gables, we're supporting and participating in this effort. While our City Attorney, Miriam Soler Ramos and I couldn't be there in person to show our city support, we were well represented by our Deputy City Attorney Cristina Suarez. Thank you for the good job and I appreciate you being the representative of the city. This is why in 2016, I introduced, and this Commission passed an ordinance prohibiting hourly rentals in Coral Gables. I'm proud to say that we were the first in the state to do that. The public policy reasons are compelling. It is well established that hotels and motels that allow for hourly rental of rooms are frequented by individuals engaged in prostitution and human sex trafficking and other illegal activity. I'm proud to have lead the way with my colleagues on the Commission. This is something I feel passionate about. Just imagine the U.S. State Department estimates that between 600 to 800,000 individuals are trafficked across our nation's borders every year with Florida receiving a high percentage of those victims. Victims of human trafficking, sex trafficking are often exposed to serious health risk, including sexually transmitted diseases, drug and alcohol addiction, PTSD, psychological trauma, and much more. It is abhorrent that people take advantage of others and basically use them as sex slaves. I feel so strongly about this that I have spoken and advocated for other municipalities to join Coral Gables by banning hourly motels. It is a known fact that when big events, such as Nasscar and Ultra come into town, so do those that commit this heinous crime of trafficking people. So, as this campaign launches, we in Coral Gables will also be launching our new awareness campaign. We will not only use our social media platforms, but we will have advertising in our kiosk and are placing flyers in our trolleys to bring awareness to societal menace. And Mr. Manager, I want to ensure that a team, Police Officers, Code Enforcement, and other city employees be trained on the signs of human trafficking. We all need to remember if we see something we must say something. I want to make you aware of something that I'm also very proud of that you should be proud of as a city, because you deserve all the credit, every single one of you, especially our City Attorney, our City Manager, and my colleagues on the Commission. While we failed as we tried incredibly hard with the help of Oscar de la Rosa, the Vice Mayor for City of Hialeah, my colleagues of West Miami, and we also tried with Joe Carollo, Commissioner Joe Carollo and Commissioner Alex de la Portilla, who lead the way in the City of Miami, we failed to pass similar legislation in those cities. We were able to, with the help of Naomi and other leaders in our community to put pressure at the state level, and I'm proud to say that the Governor on his desk has an hourly motel ban waiting to be signed. It has already passed the State House and the Senate. I was going to announce later, but I'm going to announce

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

it now. I'll be visiting and making my fourth trip to Tallahassee. One last ditch effort to ensure that our advocacy brings home the bacon, as we said before. We are spending one day, one evening, and meeting with the Governor on Thursday morning at 9:45 a.m. This is one of the items that I'm going to bring up to the Governor, which is one of our legislative agenda items. I'm going to bring up the fact that we are very proud that he's taking this step forward to preempting, even though I'm not a fan of preemption, this is a preemption that I'm willing to get behind. So, I want to thank our team, Naomi. I want to thank the City Manager, our City Attorney, especially Cristina, thank you for being there today, my colleagues on the Commission, and all the other individuals who have played a major role, Mayor Francis Suarez, Vice Mayor Oscar de la Rosa, your leadership is going to pay significant dividends once the Governor signs this legislation. Moving on, tech month. April is tech month in Greater Miami. There are numerous events taking place headlined by the annual eMerge America's Conference. I'm glad that this important community event is back after a two-year hiatus. During eMerge I will be participating in the U.S. Conference of Mayor's Summit focused on crypto currency adoption. As a city we are a leader in technological advances. I'm happy to say that on a national scale our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Last fall, I had the privilege of sharing the platform at the National Cyber Security Conference with San Jose, California, a city known globally for its technological prowess. Who would have thought back in the 80's that our city would share the stage with the capital of Silicon Valley at a technology conference? And recognition of our leadership continues. I'm proud to have been asked to present during the Bit Coin and Block Chain Summit. While I know that our Innovation and Technology Department is always looking for technological advances, it is important that we as leaders seek to learn what is on the horizon that we will make our city more efficient, transparent, accountable and effective while allowing us to focus on the customer experience. Coral Gables must remain at the forefront of technological advances. Two quick points before we adjourn, three quick points, excuse me. I've had several business owners bring to my attention saying, the issue of the pressure cleaning every six months, not everyone could comply. I want you to give it some thought Mr. Manager. Why not possibly hire pressure cleaning companies and pass the cost onto the owners? Maybe some sort of bill, some sort of bill to the Business Improvement District where we could manage the pressure companies, pressure cleaning companies every six months, and pass the bill onto the owners of the buildings. Just a thought. It's a lot more work. It's a lot more responsibility. Hermes is looking at me with his eyes.

City Manager Iglesias: It would be more expensive for them because they have to meet all city requirements than through the private sector.

Mayor Lago: Its more expensive. But if on June 30th if I don't see compliance across the board, we've got to take some steps to handle it ourselves and start billing people, because the last thing I want to do is fine people. So, I'd like for you to look into that, if possible. I'll also like to remind you that this year marks the 8th Annual Wings for Wishes event. That unique South Florida fundraising event. Wings for Wishes combines the love of chicken wings with a desire to grant children's wishes through Make a Wish Southern Florida. Wings for Wishes offers a variety of sport grill wings, savory foods, desserts and more. Some of the best craft beers are on tap. The tickets sold for this event, as well as all team entries benefit South Florida Make a Wish Foundation, have raised more than one million one hundred thousand dollars. Join this family-friendly block party on this Saturday, April 2nd and support a wonderful cause that has already

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

granted over 221 wishes. With this being said, I would like to request for the city to waive all the permit fees that they have waived in the past which will benefit this event. I ask for the support of my colleagues and would like to entertain a motion, if they would support that.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll make a motion.

Commissioner Anderson: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I believe this was done during the March meeting, the first meeting.

Mayor Lago: It was?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect.

Commissioner Anderson: That's why you had that look on your face.

Mayor Lago: My bad.

Commissioner Menendez: I withdraw my motion.

Mayor Lago: But I have another request. I'd like to put together a team, like I do every year. I bought a large sponsorship which includes four teams. I would like to, like I do every year, Mr. Manager, please have the firefighters sign up, four firefighters, the police, sign up four police officers, and I'd like for my colleagues on the Commission, to see if they would like to sign up with me, I know we have five, but we can only have four, whoever would like to join me in the wing eating contest. The last time before Covid, we came close to making it to the finals. I think we were robbed and back then we had Big Frank. He didn't hold up his weight for being 6'8" I thought he would be able to eat a lot more chicken wings. I thought his stomach was a lot longer, but I realized it was the distance from the plate to his mouth that it was delayed, bad calculations by me. I thought his height would win it all.

Commissioner Anderson: If they make a gluten-free one I'll participate.

Mayor Lago: They don't. They don't. But we still need you there for support. So its this Saturday and I would love nothing more than to join us out there. We are going to make a team. Its not about winning, its just about showing support. The tickets are already paid for. I paid them personally.

Vice Mayor Mena: A very fun event.

Mayor Lago: And it's a gut fun event for family and friends. So, I'd like to see you there this Saturday. The last thing I have to mention is, and we've all had discussions with the Manager in regards to the mobility hub. This is an incredibly important project for the city and it's a project

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

that is going to distinguish the city and really catapult us to the next level, in my opinion. I want to make sure and I tell this to the Manager, if White is unable to deliver in regards to what we need from this contractor, I want you to be rest assured that not only do we support you as we always do, but if you need to move onto the next second qualified contractor, please feel free and do that. White will not hold us hostage with a proposal that is not in line with what this city needs, and I want to make sure that the numbers that are coming back – yes, we’ve seen an escalation on prices across the board. I feel it everyday in my work, but this is an incredibly important project for the future of the City of Coral Gables. And if you feel that in the best interest of the city is to move on to the second bidder, I have no issues with that whatsoever.

City Manager Iglesias: I have no issue doing that or going out to bid.

Mayor Lago: I know you don’t. And I want to make it very clear, and I’m sending that message to Whites that they better come to the table and negotiate and continue to negotiate as they’ve done with you, because we are willing to move to the second bidder. The second bidder is just as qualified, and we are looking to deliver on this project as soon as possible.

Commissioner Fors: If I recall, it was a very close call between the first and second bidder.

Mayor Lago: Yes. I reviewed the second bidder, and I was just exposed to a recently completed project which I can share with you offline, its pretty impressive what they’ve done, in regards to a mobility hub that they just completed. And I had the information broken down to me per cost of space versus what we’re being charged, and I think there is an opportunity to maybe light a fire under Whites and get them a little bit more aggressive to the table.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we have number one, number two or we can go out to bid also.

Mayor Lago: But again, make sure you can show Whites this video and explain to them the Commission whole heartedly is willing and able at the drop of a dime to move to number two. There is no moment to waste here.

Commissioner Anderson: Is there anything that prevents us from getting two bids?

Commissioner Fors: I think both options are on the table.

City Attorney Ramos: I think the authorization was for the top, but if they failed and we’d come back and ask for authorization. Sometimes we have, where it says one or the other.

City Manager Iglesias: I have no issue either going to second or going out to bid, whatever is in the benefit of the city.

Mayor Lago: And again, make sure that Whites understands, the Commission is ready to move onto number two and negotiate with number two, or go out to bid. I’m ready to do whatever you deem appropriate. I don’t want to waste anymore time. And again, you have enough on your plate, so does staff, I don’t have time to waste, especially we have a deadline here in regard to obligations.

*City Commission Meeting
March 29, 2022*

I don't have time to waste anymore with numbers that are stratospheric, its time to really cut to the chase. Final thing, one last thing. I welcome all my colleagues, please, join me April 6th, Wednesday at 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Adult Activity Center, its my biannual Town Hall meeting. I promise you it will be 15-minute presentation by staff and myself, very short, and the rest of the time it will be public comment and if you're able to make it, I would love for you to be there. We are expecting a good crowd, probably a few hundred people will be there. We'll have some soft drinks and some light bites. I just want to make sure everybody is aware that they are invited in the community, Wednesday, April 6th from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Adult Activity Center. Thank you.