

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-1
May 19, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, 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)

Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item D-1 [Start: 12:39 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission confirming the appointment of Andres Murai (nominated by Mayor Lago), Armando Bucelo (nominated by Mayor Lago), Wayne "Chip" Withers (nominated by Vice Mayor Anderson), Maria Cruz (nominated by Commissioner Castro), Andres Correa (nominated by Commissioner Fernandez), and Jeffrey Flanagan (nominated by Commissioner Lara) to serve as members of the Code Enforcement Board, for a three (3) year term which begins on June 1, 2026 and continues through May 31, 2029

Mayor Lago: All right, in reference to item D-1, I'm pulling just in reference to one individual that I do not feel comfortable supporting and not having been nominated is Maria Cruz for that position. I have a presentation that I'd like to show if possible that I've worked on. So I think that we, there's a lot of words that are used here for members of the community, retaliation or reprisal or what I think that we need to look at things is qualifications and whether a person is fit to serve on a city board that is quasi-judicial and at the end of the day has massive powers in regards to the residents of this community. So, I put this presentation, I think it's important that everyone take a look at it

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so you can get an understanding of what I think are issues that we're facing here now. When you look at her appointment, I think she's unfit to serve on the Code Enforcement Board, a board that requires fairness and impartial judgment. The role is quasi-judicial and requires individuals who can separate personal grievances from what is best for the greater good. Mrs. Cruz has repeatedly demonstrated that she cannot do so. She lacks the temperament, credibility and character necessary to serve. Rather than approaching Code Enforcement matters with fairness and professionalism, she has shown a pattern of vindictive and targeted behavior towards residents she disagrees with personally or politically. Case in point, an individual who has worked with me in the past. Her conduct towards the residents of 722 Aledo is a prime example. After the residents attached an orchid to a street tree with pins, Code Enforcement reviewed and issued what they determined to be an appropriate notice of violation. That should have been the end of it. Instead, Mrs. Cruz relentlessly contacted and pressured Deputy Director Doug Ramirez over a period of weeks demanding harsher penalties beyond what staff deemed appropriate. As you can see here in the emails that were before. This was not the conduct; this was not the conduct of a concerned resident seeking compliance. It was a conduct of someone weaponizing the Code Enforcement process against individuals she targeted. The fact that these residents worked on my reelection campaign only makes the matter more disturbing. Maria Cruz went to this person's house, looked at the orchids and then turned them in subsequently and wrote emails to try to make sure this person was fined and held to the highest standard. What they were trying to do was just beautify the neighborhood with some orchids. The Code Enforcement Board cannot become a platform for personal vendettas, political retaliation or harassment. Yet Mrs. Cruz's actions demonstrate exactly that. Someone who repeatedly pressured staff because they are dissatisfied with professional determinations has no business serving in a quasi-judicial capacity. Her history also has raised serious concerns about honesty and integrity. Mrs. Cruz is at the center of an investigation involving fraudulent signatures from last year's failed recall campaign against me. Even more troubling is her prior involvement in misappropriation of approximately \$69,000 from student club accounts while employed at Miami Beach Senior High School. According to reports, the incident resulted in her transfer from the school, a formal letter of reprimand, restitution payments and probation. Board members are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity, professionalism and fairness. Mrs. Cruz record demonstrates the opposite. Residents of the city deserve board members who are capable of exercising sound judgment, not individuals who appear motivated by personal grudges and political animosity. For all of those reasons, I strongly oppose the appointment of Mrs. Cruz for the Code Enforcement Board. Before we leave this, I also like to go to the second phase, the second phase of this presentation. These are three individuals that were brought forth here to this Commission that are more than competent individuals who have a long history of service. Some of them even elected officials, past elected officials, some of them family members of past elected officials. One of them at the point was not the board, was not the President of the Chamber, but is now the President of the Chamber. And both Commissioner

Castro and Commissioner Fernandez voted against them. Let me read them to you. Nicholas Cabrera, who I nominated to the Board of Adjustment, Commissioner Castro voted against. Former Commissioner Chip Withers, nominated by Vice Mayor Anderson for the Planning and Zoning Board, Commissioner Castro and Fernandez both voted against this individual. An individual who has given hundreds of thousands of dollars in philanthropy to this community, has served this community with distinction and has been a pillar of this community. George Arrizurieta, whom I nominated for the Board of Adjustment, Commissioner Castro and Fernandez both voted against this individual. This is a gentleman who lived in the city for many, many years, and during moments that he was facing, moved out of the city and now has become the Chamber Chair, President, excuse me. He was voted against. A person who has served on many different boards has had major employment with Fortune 500 companies, a person who's more than capable and competent to serve on the Board of Adjustments. My point is this, this is not a personal issue. This is an issue about putting people on boards who are competent and can serve. I don't want to hear that as a vendetta when I can show you clear examples of people that are incredibly competent, people who have served here, who are not afforded the same privileges. So that's my reasoning why I'll be opposing that appointment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I passed out a copy of an email that I sent to Mrs. Maria Cruz on February 18, 2025, as further evidence as to the, on fitness to be appointed to this very important board. This was in 2025. The email was sent to Mrs. Maria Cruz. Copied were the Police Chief and the Fire Chief. *“Good evening, Mrs. Cruz, it has come to my attention that an individual observed you and the president of the fire union, you in your car, with approximately a half a dozen campaign signs from my reelection campaign and that of another candidate. The individual then approached you and inquired whether you were distributing campaign signs for my campaign and that of the other candidate. You responded that you had picked them up from lawns of property owners that you claimed you spoke to that had contacted you rather than my campaign. You asserted that the owners stated that they never requested the signs. Your activities removing signs also coincides with reports from residents of theft of my campaign signs and a request for me to drop off replacement signs. I have since personally redelivered signs to individuals that requested them again. Accordingly, demand is hereby made for return of all yard signs to my campaign that are in your possession, custody, or control or in the possession, custody, or control of others pursuant to your direction. Demand is further made that you cease and desist from removing any further yard signs from any property or instructing others to remove said signs. Residents who believe that signs were provided to them in error can easily report the inaccurate delivery themselves. My campaign website provides a means for residents to contact me directly. Lastly, please be advised*

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that Florida Statutes 812.014 provides that removal of property valued under \$20 from private property is theft and is punishable as provided in Florida Statutes Section 775.082 or Section 775.083. Please govern yourself accordingly.” What I didn't include in there for you was the fact that I delivered all my signs myself pursuant to messages that I received from residents. I never received a response from you. I did get a call from each of the Chiefs. I declined to press charges against you or the president of the fire union because this is a petty theft, but when it comes to being reappointed to a very powerful board to our city, this is not the conduct that we should be endorsing.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: I mean, I sit here in complete disbelief, and the things that we are bringing up, number one, I don't even know they're true or not at this point in the day because it's sad how this body behaves. This is a resident, a resident that's been serving that comes to every Commission meeting. Whether you like her or not, she's been very present, and if I don't, maybe if you don't remember, she stood in your living room for a grand portion of your election and agenda reviews, and you called her mayor yourself. So, it comes to surprise that this is coming right after, violating her First Amendment right. So, if this doesn't seem like retaliation, I don't know what does. I'm going to go ahead and note again, this raises serious questions about what happened during last Commission meeting. And I really hope this is not going to incur even bigger legal implications. This also creates an appearance of viewpoint discrimination, despite all the evidence you guys tried to bring in 2025 and things I never even heard of. And lastly, residents should not fear retaliation for speaking publicly. And as we can also see, this carries on. This is not only Maria Cruz, but also other residents. Mr. Rip Holmes was up here, fearing the words that would come out of his mouth because of retaliation or for not letting him talk. So, this is my appointee. It's a shame that we have to, this is an embarrassment to the city, honestly, a big one. And we have to bring this upon; this is just ridiculous. I think it's beneath the office of all of us.

Mayor Lago: Anything else?

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I think some interesting things that were said, and I thought you were talking about yourself, weaponizing Code Enforcement against political adversaries. During my campaign, numerous people reached out to me because after they put up my yard signs, Code Enforcement was on them. You talked about not putting personal grievances before the public good. You do that every single Commission meeting. You mentioned three votes that were taken

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against your appointees. I can speak to the two that I voted against. I did vote against Chip Withers getting reappointed or appointed because of the premise where somebody was being retaliated against because they had supported Commissioner Castro and myself. On Mr. Arrizurieta, he is the President of the Chamber today, but at the time, I voted against him because he was not a resident of the city. And that is a stance that I have taken up here time and again. I have voted in favor of the Vice Mayor's appointee to the Disability Advisory Board because she is the most qualified and we did not have somebody in the city who could serve that role. That's the exception that I have made when it comes to appointing non-residents to the city because that was a commitment I made to residents. Because I believe that if we have an advisory board on City of Coral Gables affairs, they should be Coral Gables residents who sit on those boards. And we had plenty of qualified people to serve on the Board of Adjustment as we have found numerous others who have been appointed since, including your current appointee. I may not agree with him politically on some of the things that he does. He's constantly bashing me out there with false information that he's trying to spread about me. And I still support it because he was your appointee. Now, you don't like when people say this is retaliation, but this is exactly what it is. This is exactly what it is. You violated her First Amendment right last Commission meeting. I said it last Commission meeting. That was a decision three of you made. Even against the advice of the City Attorney. Today, you're going to then retaliate against her a second time. It is sad when the government of Coral Gables is worse than the government of Nicolás Maduro and Raúl Castro. And that's what we're living today. We're living under political oppression. Where every chance you get, Mr. Mayor, you call people to make threats against me, against my wife, and against members of our family. And I'm quite honestly fed up with it. Man up. You're not two years old anymore. This is not kindergarten. This is not your little playground where you can say, oh, I don't want you to play in this playground. Commissioner Melissa Castro and Commissioner Ariel Fernandez were elected by the residents of the City of Coral Gables. And you have not a duty, a responsibility to work with us when we're here. And just because you disagree with the resident, you do not have the right to silence them or to persecute them or to retaliate against them. But you do it on a daily basis. When I'm getting calls from people who tell me that you are getting more aggressive every day, that I should be concerned about my safety and my wife's safety, we have a problem in Coral Gables. This city, before you became Mayor, was the model for everybody to follow. Where are we today? You like to point the fingers at everybody else. Everybody else is to blame for all your problems. I have heard from numerous mutual friends that you blame me for every single problem in your life. Well, look in a mirror. I don't blame you for problems in my life. My problems are my own problems. Your problems are your own. You have caused your own problems. Retaliation under my watch is not going to happen. I will support reappointing Maria Cruz to this board because to this point, as far as I know, she has done her job on that board. I have yet to hear from a single member of that board who has raised a concern about her behavior in that board. And you like to bring up a lot of historic information, which is inaccurate too, because the

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Vice Mayor has corrected Maria Cruz's issue on the school board. She read the letter that the school board provided her, which corrected that record. And you like to bring up the issue of your friend who, according to you, is just trying to beautify the city, but you've persecuted other people for similar things. So, if somebody else does it, it is a problem, and you submit the complaint to Code Enforcement. Yet, if your friends do it, they're just trying to beautify the city. That's the way you look at it. There was, no, I'm not done.

Mayor Lago: Just want to respect your time.

Commissioner Fernandez: You made several comments. You mentioned that everybody you have appointed is a more than competent individual. Some of the accusations that you have made against Maria Cruz can qualify under other people who are under investigation, who have been investigated, who have been prosecuted. They're your appointees. And you know what I have done with those appointees? I have voted to support them because you as a member of this dais have the right to appoint whoever you'd like to these boards. That is your decision. That is Commissioner Castro's decision. Now, if we're only going to hold a standard to the people that Commissioner Castro or Commissioner Fernandez nominate, then we really need to review this process because there's definitely a problem. Because just the fact that you're the Mayor and you have a majority does not mean you get to dictate what everybody else does. You don't get to make those decisions for everybody else. And residents stood clear on that when they voted on the item on removing members of boards. It was an overwhelming vote against your proposition. So, you can grandstand all you want about, you know, this person has done this to me and we can't reappoint them because they're just not qualified, but let's talk facts. You violated her First Amendment right last time. Now you are retaliating against her this time just because she has spoken out against some of your proposals and you don't like anybody's differing opinions with you. You don't like anybody going out there and speaking against what Vince Lago believes is the right way to move for the City of Coral Gables. Just like you don't like the fact that you have two differing voices up here who sometimes disagree. Because let's face it, 95 percent of the time we vote unanimously. We disagree on a minuscule number of the things in the city. Yet for that 5 percent, Commissioner Castro and myself, along with our families are retaliated against and persecuted in Coral Gables because we have the audacity not to support Vince Lago 100 percent of the time. And that's disappointing because that's not Coral Gables. That's not the Coral Gables that George Merrick founded. Today we had a veteran here who's 101 years old, has lived in Coral Gables for 78 years. And the one thing he told us, the Constitution is the one thing that we have to stand for. And last Commission meeting, this Commission voted three, two against the US Constitution. America has stood 250 years because of the great doctor and because of the people like him. But it definitely has not stood because of people who have stood up and started retaliating and violating the Constitutional rights of other members of this community. That's unacceptable. And you have an opportunity to reset today and now. As I've told you numerous times, I am here

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to work for the residents of Coral Gables. When the Miami Herald asked me about the upcoming election, my response was, my job is to be a Commissioner, not a candidate. And that's what I'm here doing. And we have five people on this dais. And I believe that at least four of us are interested in working on the benefits of this city, not personal interest. And I think that we can all set our differences aside or our personal grievances and focus on the public good, as you just said, should be the bar that we set for the people that we appoint to boards. That needs to be applied to ourselves on this dais as well. Those are my thoughts.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, would you like to respond before I respond?

Commissioner Lara: Sure, take a second. First thing I'd like to say is, we all need to try the decaf, right? Everybody should take a sip of decaf going forward. I believe that we should all emphasize being statesmen, not a lot less being, well, what we've been seeing for quite some time on the dais. This is not a rubber-stamping enterprise when somebody is nominated to be on a board. It's been evidenced before. Anyone of us here has, during a previous vote, either said yes or said no for our particular reasons. I disagree, however, that anyone has violated First Amendment rights, as you referred to in the last meeting. In fact, I took a moment to comment. And the first time I've ever done that, really, at a public comment from a speaker, I commented that Mrs. Maria Cruz spoke professionally, ethically, calmly, and got across her points without being provocative or inciting or trying to escalate or take actions that could lead to people saying things they may regret or that's not becoming of the serious work that we do here in these chambers. I would not say that's what I thought. The last Commission meeting, in her expression, embodied, but certainly this time, and I thought it was worth making that point, noting it. So, in the end, I believe that before we go around hurling accusations that people are retaliating because that's a very serious term, it's a very serious accusation that's being made. Commissioner Fernandez, I did mention at the last meeting that as you're saying that there was retaliation by this Commission from comments being made during the public comment section, I reminded you that it wasn't even a year ago that when Gonzalo Sanabria made comments from the public comment section towards you, expressing his profound displeasure of the hiring of former City Manager Amos Rojas, that you immediately stated, from what I would characterize the bully pulpit, that your lawyers would be contacting him shortly for having made those statements. And you could have chosen to do this 100 different ways. You could have had your lawyers just contact him. You didn't need to broadcast that to the city with the finger basically pointed at him saying, how dare you say anything to me that's displeasing. I'm not saying that that's behavior that I would be supportive of, but I feel the need that if you're saying that that's what's been going on here, you need to take a look at yourself in the mirror.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I mean, I just want, once the Commissioner is done, are you done, sir? I want to make sure I respect.

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Commissioner Lara: I just think it's worth repeating one more time. We all need to remind ourselves and act as the collegial body that we are here on this dais. I try and lead by example. I'm only human as we all are, but this is not the time. And the residents are more than tired. I am of political grandstanding. Let's just get to the business of the people and move on.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I think one of the big issues here, obviously, is the effort to force you over the edge. Tomorrow you can make headlines in the paper or the blogs. We're very well aware of what we have here. But I find very interesting from Ariel, and I've known him for a long time, is the ridiculousness with the grandstanding comment. There hasn't been one piece of consequential legislation that you've written three years of collecting a paycheck here. And the funny thing you said the other day is that I'm a Republican, and Republicans try to limit their government. Remember, in government, you need legislation to move government forward. That statement of less government is the most absurd statement I've ever heard in my life in regard to actually delivering on your privilege to service. The vague accusations that have been hurled here for years about problems and temperament and threats, the people vote. They voted in the referendums. They were clear what they wanted. They wanted November elections. They wanted to overturn and ensure that they had control over salary increases. They wanted to make sure that there was an IG when you voted against an IG. Both of you did. But what I'm trying to explain to you, and I know you want to cover it up and you don't want to face it. The reason why this is a major issue and the reason why I bring up the issue with Aledo is very simple. Let's refocus and recalibrate. You have a member of this board who went out of her way, drove to an individual's house who works for me and turned them into the city via public record or an email. And in probably half a dozen emails requested that that person be fined, not warned. You don't see me engaging in an email with that individual trying to get him off that warning. No, but she wanted to make sure she nailed him to the cross and made him pay. And I have to say, over and over and over again, as a sitting member on that board, as the person who turned that individual in, made sure that they were held to the highest standard and that they were fined. If you think that's appropriate, if one of my members did that on a board, I would remove them immediately because that doesn't show, in my opinion, prudent judgment. And when you talk about majorities, let me not have to remind you the over one year of Amos Rojas and the stunt that you pulled here when you brought Amos Rojas here into the middle of a Commission meeting and basically allowed for a person to take over the city who would leave by one o'clock and receive the \$365,000 payment. And you didn't care about my input. You rammed it down everybody's throat. I asked for a search. You didn't want to do it. So, at the end of the day, you had over two years of complete and control here in the city. And not one piece of consequential legislation was passed, neither City Hall, neither mobility hub. Nothing was done. The city was frozen in place. So, if you think it's appropriate that a member of the Code Enforcement Board goes out of their way, drives to a person's house, turns that person in, and then repeatedly deals with Code Enforcement in an effort to get that person fined, I don't think that's appropriate. And I can't stand with that. And if you tell

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me that Chip Withers is not a person who I believe should be on any boards in the city, whether I disagree with it or not, that guy has paid his dues and you have to respect him. That guy did a great job in the city. Even though I may not have agreed with everything he did, he gave up over a dozen years of his life to serve this community. At the end of the day, if he wants to serve on a board and give it his time, I don't know how you vote against that individual. So, at the end of the day, we can talk about vague accusations and all that kind of ridiculous things. You've been throwing those out for I don't know how long already. And at the end of the day, the residents see through it. You're not going to get me to go absolutely nuts here on the Commission floor. I'm not supporting, just like you have not supported previous individuals in the past. It's within my right not to support that person. I have actual proof of why that person shouldn't be on a board. I provided it here. It won't make the Gazette tomorrow or whatever they call café con leche. But at the end of the day, it's there. You have a board member, a sitting board member who goes and turns that person in and intentionally tries to hurt a resident. If you think that's okay and you want your board member to do that, then you're well within your right. But please don't tell me that I'm the one doing retaliation when I get calls from FDLE, the IG, and the COE that before the laws were changed, you were the biggest proponent of turning people in using, again, false and ambiguous statements. And it's clear as day how many people you turned into the COE when they used to allow you to do anonymous recommendations. Everybody in this county knows it. You've done it to multiple elected officials. You've done it to people in the city. You've done it all over. So, at the end of the day, this is simple. No one here is having an argument. You have an opinion. I have my own opinion. I cannot support that individual. And at the end of the day, we move forward. We move forward. Don't take it personal. I didn't take it personal when you didn't vote for Chip Withers or for Nick or for George Arrizurieta, very competent people. It's okay, you didn't vote for them. You're taking this way too personal. Don't worry about it.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: One second, the Vice Mayor was next.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I need to finish up on some of the incorrect statements that were made. Ms. Cruz was my appointee to the Code Enforcement Board. And long before the yard signs were stolen and I chose not to press charges, I received numerous calls from individuals not only who served on the board, but people that have been in the audience asking me to remove her. The Code Enforcement Board is much different criteria than any other board in our city because it's subject to a Florida statute that prohibits the removal of a board member except for cause. Had I chosen to press charges, I would have had the cause. I chose not to. But that doesn't mean reappointment to the same board is appropriate. As far as decorum, whether on that board or other boards, that has been lacking. I can tell you that after the meeting we had the last time and the lack of decorum that was displayed by Mrs. Cruz, there were some people that had been thinking about running for

office that said no way. We need to get this Commission back to a status of ethical behavior and decorum both by not only the Commission, but the residents that choose to come up here and speak. The type of behavior that was displayed is discouraging good people from running because they don't want to have to go through this. Because no matter what you do, you're not ever going to keep everybody happy. And to have to be facing that when you're giving up so much of your time, so much of your personal time, so much of your professional time, to have to be badgered with comments while you're serving is just unseemly in this little city that should rise to a much higher standard. So, the reasons are clear. They weren't invented yesterday. It was February 18th, 2025. As reported by a resident, the yard signs that were requested from me that I personally delivered, there was no mistake on where they were placed. The excuse that Mrs. Cruz gave that they were delivered where people didn't request them was just a false statement. Not only was it a false statement, but when I hand-delivered them from people that I had gotten information from that wanted them, I also left a handwritten note with the signs thanking people for supporting me and providing my personal number. If it was misdelivered by mistake, and I do make mistakes, they could simply call me or text me. I have nothing further to state.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, go ahead.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, you know, you like to talk about Amos Rojas. Amos Rojas was the first at City Hall every morning, and usually the last to leave. I don't know where you've gotten this premise that he would leave at one o'clock. Amos Rojas served under two U.S. Presidents as U.S. Marshal. I guess, in your book, that makes him unqualified. You kept talking about, oh, we can't trust Amos Rojas. Amos Rojas, I believe to this day, still has a top-secret security clearance given by the U.S. government. Getting that is a lengthy process and not easy to get, and you must be a person of full integrity to get it. You said a lot of things in your little monologue, but I'll tell you this. You have to go and sleep at night. I really don't know how you sleep with yourself at night, because of the amount of things that you've said that are just completely false. And you forget, of the people up here, there's only two people in this room who know you better than anybody else, and that's Maria Cruz and Ariel Fernandez. For 10 years, we sat in your living room going over every single piece of legislation. And what you wanted, and you always said it, I have to be the one that passes the most legislation so that I can seem like the most successful. I stand by my statement. I don't understand this whole thing that you said about, it's absurd to you. A government that over-regulates its people is not a Republican principle. It may be in your book, but it's not a Republican principle. And we have passed many great things in this city since I've been up here. We created the Senior Relief Grant Program, first of its kind in the city, where we're actually giving a check to the most needy seniors in our community. We passed the Disabled Veterans Relief Grant Program to all the disabled veterans who live in this city. We finally delivered on reducing the garbage fee, something that you and I, even before I was on here, had hoped to accomplish someday. We got it done. We delivered for the people. It was the only time

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it's been done in the history of this city. I could go on, but we're just going to make up that all this is false.

Mayor Lago: Why don't you go on? I'd like to hear what other things you've accomplished.

Commissioner Fernandez: Sidewalk repairs. Under your watch as Mayor, we had a list that was seven years long. And Mr. Manager, we've tackled that list. We have more than tripled the funding for sidewalks. And that list is getting shorter every single day, to the point that in our capital review projects meeting, we're now projecting only needing to put a million dollars a year going forward to continue to tackle the sidewalk repairs that we've had. Our traffic calming. You voted against funding traffic calming. We got it done. What about historic preservation? Delivering on pickleball courts. All these things. You had been kicking the can down the road because that's how a successful politician remains in office for 13 years. Because what do they do? They create a problem and keep it as long as they can so they can tell you, it's going to take us another two years. Because I've seen that many times. I've been in government long enough to tell you that's what politicians do. It's always about the next reelection. That's not what I came here to do. If you look at my campaign promises, I delivered on all of them in my first year in office because that was my mission. But they weren't your goals. Because your goal was to keep those problems going. That way you can tell people, we don't have the money this year, maybe next year. So, they got to vote for you next year to keep you in office to make sure that that gets accomplished. That's the reality. But here we are continuing to talk about Maria Cruz. And you talk about Chip Withers. I did not pull item D-1. And Chip Withers is on this list to a point. I intended to vote for Chip Withers to be on this board. So, I don't understand why you're saying, oh, you have an issue with Chip Withers. I do not. I voted against Chip Withers two years ago because of the way that he was being appointed. And I made that very clear on the record. The good thing is there's a record. You go back and watch the meetings, and you can see what the reality is. Because you love to go out there and give credit to other people. We never acknowledge what Commissioner Castro and I have accomplished. Because you prefer to give that credit to somebody else. Because for you, you have to play politics all the time. Through your Coral Gables First, through your Aesop Gables. You use every little tool that you have. Your little mastermind team, trying to create all sorts of lies in the community to disparage your colleagues in order for you to look good. And that's what you tried with us at Gables Insider. And you failed. And that's why today, you consider me an enemy. Because I would not stand with you on some of the things that you were doing. Mainly the mobility hub. Which yes, we stopped the mobility hub. And guess what? The Manager just told me this week; we've saved \$10 million thanks to the fact that that project was stopped two years ago. Because the cost today is less than it was two years ago. Was it not, Mr. Manager? That was the conversation, the numbers that you showed me.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, sir.

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Commissioner Fernandez: Microphone.

City Manager Iglesias: The costs are lower, appear to be lower.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, you know, it's very easy to get on that high tower and say, oh my God, nobody accomplishes anything except for me. But we're a team up here. And we're supposed to be a team. Whether you like me or not, whether you like Commissioner Castro or not, we were elected by the people of the City of Coral Gables to serve with you. And that's what we're here to do.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: If I may, I'd like to respond to that. And then we're going to take a break. Actually, we're going to vote on this issue. So, if you look up delusional, that is what is the definition in the dictionary. To take credit for those items is absolutely ridiculous. The proof is in the pudding. I run every two years; people make a decision. To say that Amos Rojas was the most hardworking guy, I'm here every day along with the Vice Mayor. You stopped having office hours well over a year ago. You're never here. You don't engage; you don't have anything on the agenda. So, you may say, I don't know, some Republican over-regulation effort that you're doing. Just the proof is in the agenda. You can't hide it. It's here. You have to legislate. The fact that you'll take credit for sidewalks, I'll prove it to you, it's very simple. Mr. Manager, what was the budget for sidewalks four years ago? What did we have? It's around \$2 million, right?

City Manager Iglesias: \$2 million dollars.

Mayor Lago: What do we have today for sidewalks?

City Manager Iglesias: About \$2 million dollars.

Mayor Lago: You see, this is the insanity. He says here, it was tripled the sidewalk budget. He'll say anything. So let me also give you an example. He says, I voted against sidewalks. No, I'm the one that brought the temporary traffic calming effort here when we went to see and meet with residents in the neighborhood. We spent close, I think it was like \$4 or \$500, \$4 or \$500,000 to have the temporary traffic calming so that we can meet the needs of people that have to wait three or four years.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor, it's temporary traffic.

Mayor Lago: So, you can say anything you want up here, but the proof is in the votes. The proof is in the work that's been accomplished. Now, the facts are, as I said there very clearly, the votes are there. I have every right to vote in favor or against somebody that I think is capable. I will not support Maria Cruz. And I think it's great that Commissioner Lara has brought it up twice in the

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last two meetings. Commissioner Fernandez says that, again, retaliation. I was here, it's on the record, it's on the video. Gonzalo Sanabria, him publicly threatening him that he's going to have his attorneys call him, which he did. That's done on the record. So, we can gloss over that at the end of the day, but I've never called or sent somebody here, a resident, the lawyers after. I think that's absolutely insane. Why would you do that? And by the way, there was a great op-ed today, since you mentioned Aesop's Gables, I'll bring it up. There was a great op-ed today about Ariel Fernandez's efforts to do a public records request on over 150 members of the City of Coral Gables chat. And he was requesting all that information. So now you have a sitting Commissioner making public records requests of residents. That reminds me of Cuba, Nicaragua, and type of behavior like that. So, you know, one thing I do give credit to, and I will always give credit to, Ariel is probably one of the most talented theater directors I've ever seen in my life. And I don't know where he thinks I have problems in my life and my family and stuff like that. The only one that's made issues is about it and has taken pleasure in poking fun and saying things about me is this individual to my left. And yes, we had a relationship, but I could not support him when he asked me to support him to run for public office. He neither has the demeanor, the temperament, or the work ethic to be an elected official. The residents deserve better. So, we're judged here by what we accomplish and what we do. And the bottom line is your record is bringing Amos Rojas, raising your salary by 101 percent, giving yourself a personal expense account, a car allowance, voting against an inspector general, opposing moving elections to November, eventually voting for it because you knew it was right, and getting rid of an incredibly competent City Manager who's here. Thank God he's back. So, I think it's very clear where we stand. We do have personal issues against each other. It's perfectly fine. It's clear as day, but my record speaks for itself. I put everything I do on a website, and I think it's clear and you should do the same thing. You should have the pride to put on votevancelago.com, votariofernandez.com, everything you've accomplished, everything that you've done. So, people can judge you. And so, people can see what you've done. I'd be the first to want to take a look at that website. Because when you stand up and you make comments that we've tripled the sidewalk budget, that is a lie. And you said, I oppose traffic calming. Mr. Manager, were we doing traffic calming before Commissioner Fernandez and Commissioner Castro were elected? Yes or no?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, we were, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Well, I don't know what you're talking about. That's just insanity and misleading tactics in an effort to, you've never been effective, and it won't be effective in this campaign either. People want change just like they want to change in the referendums. That's why they overwhelmingly won. Let's move on. We have a long agenda.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead, Commissioner.

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Commissioner Castro: Vice Mayor Anderson, you spoke about the decorum briefly about civility, and I'm mentioning respect. This past week, my father passed away, and I had commitments with this city. I was going to read a book. We were going to do the literacy festival. I had to show up to the Actors Playhouse. But when we talk about respect, the decorum, and civility, those are very important, especially here, especially the head of this Commission, our Mayor. When I'm making the best of my efforts to go ahead and stand in one piece in the front of the Literacy Festival, and when you have a sitting Mayor look at you from your legs all the way up, and then mock you, stand up, and laugh about your pose and try to pose like you. Looking at you up and down. Try to intimidate me. I think more than intimidation, that's more like sexual harassment, okay. So, talking about respect, I think that's the first thing you should think about, especially having two daughters. Respect, especially for a woman. I really hope you can support my appointee. I don't think you are, but you're just digging a bigger grave for yourself.

Mayor Lago: So, in response to that, this is the level of insanity that we've dealt with over the last three years. It's a fact, both to the left and to the right. It'll never end. They'll make insane accusations. They'll say crazy things. They'll put it on the blogs, pump it out. At the end of the day, people see through it. You want to know why? And I'll leave you with this. Because you talk, Fernandez talks about intimidation, but he forgets that he intimidated Gonzalo Sanabria here, right in front of us. Oh, but let's forget about that. I don't want to talk about that. It's a very short memory. But what you don't realize, and you do, but you just don't want to acknowledge it. There was civility here for over 10 years, before you were ever here. There were never issues. There was serious discourse on whether Miracle Mile should be up-zoned. There was serious discourse whether we should build a public garage through a partnership with Alan Morris and Related Group. I disagreed, but it never deteriorated to where we are today. It only deteriorated when the bookends, to my left and to the right, showed up in one of the most low voter turnouts in the city's history. At the end of the day, the residents in 2025 corrected that, and in 2026 corrected that by their votes. People are tired of this behavior, the constant attacks, the blogs, and it'll happen again in 2026, when there's elections in November. So my point is that you can live in this false reality and say that you're not the problem, but if you look at over the 10 years when I was a Commissioner and Mayor, and I ran this Commission with the help of my colleagues in the Commission, we never had to have these issues where there was talking over each other, or we had to abide with strict Roberts Rules. Nobody was sanctioned. Nobody was told they can't speak. Why has that happened all during the time that we've been here? Why? And it all goes back to the fact that you and I do not agree, but you use tactics that, in my opinion, are distasteful. They attack families. You've done it on many occasions. You use the IG, you use the COE, you use the FDLE and thank God the COE can no longer allow anonymous because you, you, and I know this for a fact, are the biggest contributor to this, was the biggest contributor to the COE. You've done it to so many elected officials and people who don't see eye to eye with you. You've done it to even family members of you who now hold public office. So, at the end of the day, we move on. And we

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continue to work on behalf of the residents. I continue to do office hours, which you abandoned. I continue to be here and pass an agenda full of legislation. I continue to negotiate like I did this week in an effort to bring more parks to the city and do great things here in the city. And you hold on to the fact that you don't want to over-regulate. All I hear is excuses, Commissioner. And it's time for you to man up and handle what you have to handle. Stop looking for reasons to feel good about the fact that you've wasted a God-given opportunity to be an elected official in this community. And you say things that we tripled the sidewalk budget. That's insanity. I wish we had tripled the sidewalk budget. You know we haven't tripled the sidewalk budget because you've been here. We haven't. And you say that I didn't support traffic calming. Of course I supported traffic calming. We started that program before we ever got here. Both the temporary one and the permanent one. So, let's be honest with the residents. Let's be honest with what we've done here. You don't have to attack me because of your lack of legislative accomplishments. Just, you have time. Put some things together. Look, I gave you a task and that was to address the issue of the garbage. You abandoned that. You didn't even address it. I've been having to deal with it with the ACM, the DCM and the City Manager. Let's handle the recycling issue. You never took the bull by the horns and never did anything. I told you, people have asked you, hey, do the issue with the golf carts. You own a golf cart. You never did it. I took care of that. So, there's issues here that I don't have a problem collaborating with you but bring something to the table. Don't try to take credit for other people's work. That's what your reputation has always been. And you always blame people for the fact of your shortcomings. By the end of the day, you're not going to get me here on a gotcha moment. You'll probably print something on the Gazette as the owner of the Gazette. And at the end of the day, we can go back and forth all day. The proof is in the pudding. The proof is in what the accomplishments are.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, finish up. I'll give you the last word. Go ahead. So, you can feel good by yourself.

Commissioner Fernandez: You know this is the third time that I hear about complaints with FDLE, with the Ethics Commission. So, when you made those false allegations, I called the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission and spoke to the director and the Florida Department of Ethics. And you know what both of them said? They sent me a document which proves that you are making false statements about me. And they are looking into who it was that you spoke to, who according to you told them that I am this person because that's affecting the integrity of their offices. Because no complaints have been filed. I also have no relatives in elected office, so I'm not sure who you're referring to. I mean, now we're even making up that I have relatives in elected office. I'm at a loss. You obviously have a situation you need to address, and I'm really concerned about you. I'm really concerned about you. I should ask the City Attorney, do I have to pay rent for living free in his brain? Because obviously, I am. You call people all the time to talk about me. Talk about you. If

you're so proud of what you've done, don't waste people's time. And no, I do not answer to you. You notice what you're trying to do is get me to do what you want me to do. I answer to the people, not to you. And that's the problem. That's your problem with me, that I don't answer to you. And you know what? Let's put it on the record. You know why this Commission worked 100% of the time 5-0? Do you want me to say it? Do you really want me to go there? You want me to talk about how we were in your house, Maria Cruz, JC Diaz-Pradon and I, and you would call your colleagues to make sure they were supporting your legislation and to answer any questions and you would put them on speakerphone and put the phone on the table and tell us, don't talk, so they don't know you're on the phone.

Mayor Lago: Ariel.

Commissioner Fernandez: And you would text.

Mayor Lago: Ariel, you have lost your mind.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, because it's not convenient to you right now.

Mayor Lago: Ariel. Ariel.

Commissioner Fernandez: It is not convenient to you. But Maria Cruz is nodding in the back because we were in your house and this happened repeatedly.

Mayor Lago: Ariel, you have lost your mind.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yeah, no, you have, you have. Again, the people who know you best are the people you're picking a fight with.

Mayor Lago: I'm not picking a fight with anyone.

Commissioner Fernandez: You are picking a fight.

Mayor Lago: The residents see through your game, and they see what fight that you fight.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, you know what? If residents see through a game, they're seeing through a veil of mirrors that you're putting on to show you. You know, this is the classic case. You hear about the boy that cried wolf. This is the wolf gnawing at your leg and pointing at the boy and saying it's his fault.

Mayor Lago: Okay. That's exactly what we're doing here. Point taken, point taken, Ariel.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yeah, so let's vote.

Mayor Lago: Let's move on, let's vote. Okay, let's vote. All right, so we have a motion for D-1 outside of obviously accepting Ms. Maria Cruz for her appointment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I will move to appoint, confirm the appointment of the following nominees. Andres Mirai, Amanda Bucelo, Wayne Chip Withers, Andres Correa, Jeffrey Flanagan. That's the complete list. For a three-year term that begins June 1, 2026, and continues through May 31, 2029, to the Code Enforcement Board.

Commissioner Lara: Second. We have a second on the motion. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have a member of the public to speak on this item. Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Greetings. Jackson Rip Holmes, 35 Sedona Avenue. I want to go directly to a point. Y'all mentioned the Gables Insider. And it was Ariel Fernandez who blew the whistle on your dishonesty, Mayor Lago, in relation to the rewriting or whatever of the city zoning code. This was something like a four-year project that was basically government in secret. And you were at the same time telling people that you are transparent. Indeed, you told me that Miracle Mile would not go up an inch. But during that period of time, you had a Sunshine meeting about taking Miracle Mile up to six stories. So, you were lying, okay. And you are a compulsive liar. And I think you tell more public statements that are false than that are true. And yet you want to censure people or silence Maria Cruz just for telling the truth, that you're acting like a king. He was the one, Ariel Fernandez, who exposed that you were having this whole private government in secret rewrite of the zoning code that you held. I did a public records myself. Did you ever disclose that in your notifications to residents? Did you ever disclose it anywhere? And you didn't. And it's a total change of the government. We have, what is the reality? You were financed by developers, okay. Ms. Anderson, you switch sides. You get financed by developers. So, you're consistent in your votes for whatever the developers want is what you'll deliver on, including the crucifixion of any of the opponents of runaway development. And that's what's going on today. I ask you to think about the Everglades. There are people who want to develop the Everglades. They want to move the urban development boundary. And once that's done, you can never undo it. And that's what you're doing to the City of Coral Gables. And that's what this is all about. Maria Cruz had the intestinal fortitude to oppose that. The citizens of Coral Gables oppose it. And you get votes because you lie to the residents of Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Manager, do you know what the height is on Miracle Mile? Just to make sure there's been enough confusion here today.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, it's 50 feet.

Mayor Lago: Okay, how many stories is that?

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City Manager Iglesias: It's about four, three to four stories.

Mayor Lago: Okay, just want to make sure because I just said I rezoned it to six stories, but I wasn't here for that meeting. So, I can't, I don't, it didn't happen.

Mr. Holmes: You had a Sunshine meeting discussing doing that, and you said it.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. We have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir. Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Mayor, for you to sit here and go like this and say I'm delusional and making up stuff, number one, the one thing I pride myself on, I don't lie. I don't lie. That's number one, okay. And as a man, can you look at me in the face and say that did not happen? Because before you even think of responding, just keep in mind that that was photographed, that there's videos, and that the people that surrounded you were laughing and were part of that as well, okay. So, can you, as a man, look at me in the face and say that didn't happen?

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, please vote.

Commissioner Castro: Can you, yes or no?

Mayor Lago: Stop with the theatrical.

Commissioner Castro: Yes or no, can you? Because this really needs to stop. You've had me thrown out of ribbon cuttings when I've been invited, okay. You've had public discussions with me that were embarrassing in front of my son. I'm a woman that deserves respect, and it needs to stop now.

Mayor Lago: Vote.

Commissioner Castro: Can you look at me in the face and say that didn't happen? You can admit to it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, please vote.

Commissioner Castro: I'm not going to go after you illegally. I want you to admit it and at least apologize.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, please vote.

Commissioner Castro: You can't do it, huh?

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Mayor Lago: Commissioner, please vote.

Commissioner Castro: That's embarrassing. That's embarrassing.

Mayor Lago: Enough with the grandstanding.

Commissioner Castro: No.

Mayor Lago: Let's go, move on. Come on, I know this is what you want for the blogs.

Commissioner Castro: My vote was no, and you're an embarrassment to the city.

Commissioner Fernandez: I will vote yes, because I do not believe that any of the other appointees should suffer because of the retaliation by this Commission. It's disappointing that this is Coral Gables. It's disappointing.

Commissioner Lara: I'll join in Commissioner Castro's vote, no.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And before I vote, Mr. Holmes, the statements you made about me are false. Okay.

[Inaudible speakers in the audience]

Mayor Lago: Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop. There's enough confusion. We're not going to have it here, enough.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I'm just putting you on notice. They're false statements. Excuse me. Excuse me.

[Inaudible speakers in the audience]

Mayor Lago: Please, I'm asking you, please. Enough with, enough, please, please. I'm going to have you removed, please. I know that you want a circus, but it can be published and everything. I get it. I understand. Enough, enough, okay, please. I think there's a clarification request by Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Yes. So, the vote is an exclusion of one individual, but the affirmation of everyone else.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Lara: Okay, so in that respect, my vote is yes, not a no.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, and my vote is yes.

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Mayor Lago: My vote is yes. Moving on to the next item, item F-3.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll make a motion to appoint Maria Cruz as Commissioner Castro's appointee.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me. Madam City Attorney, for the record, because we've had this issue the last time, can we have a conversation? We're on item F-3, item F-3. You have another Commissioner that goes out of turn and basically makes a motion. Where do we, it doesn't matter. We're on another separate item. There's nothing to do with it.

City Attorney Suarez: So, I understood that there was, it was an amended motion on F, I'm sorry, on D-1 is the way I understood it, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: And that was the one that was approved.

Mayor Lago: We just voted.

City Attorney Suarez: Right, but that motion passed and it was an, I understood it as an amended motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right, and F-3 was called.

Mayor Lago: And I called F-3. So now do we move forward on F-3, or do we now hear this motion that comes out of, you know, out of left field? What do you want to do?

City Attorney Suarez: I think you've moved on to F-3. I think you've called F-3 now.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. This is, by the way, I want to put on the record. This is the second meeting where Commissioner Fernandez does this. Robert's Rules is not a strong suit, even though he claims it is, and does not, and I have to call on the City Attorney to correct the record and do this again. We have to be better than this. I know you want to get your way, but at the end of the day, we can do much better, okay.