

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting  
Second Budget Hearing  
September 24, 2024  
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 Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.**

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Assistant Finance Director, Paula Rodriguez**

**Governmental Affairs Manager, Fernando Weiner**

**Police Chief, Ed Hudak**

**Parking Director, Monica Beltran**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**David Renshaw**

**Maria Cruz**

**Theodore Gibson**

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Agenda Items 1 through 4 are related [5:01 p.m.]  
Second Budget Hearing 2024-2025 Presentation.

Public Hearing for obtaining comments relative to Budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

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City Commission Meeting

September 12, 2024

Agenda Items 1 through 4 are related - Presentation of Fiscal Year 2024-2025 City Budget; public hearing for obtaining comments relative to Budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025; Ordinances providing for the levy of taxes, fixing the rate of such levy, providing for segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy, and adopting the Annual Budget of Estimated Revenues and Expenditures for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2024 and ending September 30, 2025; and resolution adopting the Capital Improvement Program for the five fiscal years from 2025 to 2029.

An Ordinance of the City Commission providing for the levy of taxes for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2024 and ending September 30, 2025; fixing the rate of such levy; providing for segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy; providing for the separability of the provisions hereof; and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2024.

An Ordinance of the City Commission adopting the Annual Budget of Estimated Revenues and Expenditures for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1, 2024 and ending September 30, 2025; providing for separability of the provisions hereof; and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1, 2024.

A Resolution of the City Commission adopting the Capital Improvement Program for the five fiscal years from 2025 to 2029.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon to everyone. Thank you for being here. Welcome to the final and second budget hearing, September 24th, 2024 at 5:01. Before we begin, I'd like to first thank all of staff and everyone who played an integral part in making sure that we could deliver this year's budget. I'm always grateful for your assured commitment to the City Beautiful, your hard work, your effort, and the residents in the business community, thank you. Before we begin, Madam City Attorney, is there any housekeeping issues that we need to address or can we go into the first item, the presentation?

City Attorney Suárez: We can go into the first item.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Paula, how are you?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I'm good. How are you?

Mayor Lago: Good. Good afternoon.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Mayor, Commissioners. As always, thank you to my staff, our Budget staff. This is not my efforts, but the efforts of many, not only our Budget staff, but also our department directors and department staff who helped put this budget together each year, as well as the support and input from the Commission, and obviously, the City Manager's Office. So, today we are here for the second budget hearing for the fiscal 2024-25 budget, and there will be three items that we will be doing today. So, the first item is adopting the millage, our tax levy for the fiscal year 2025 budget, and so the fiscal year 2025 budget is based on a millage rate of 5.559, which maintains that millage for 10 years. It is 8.4

percent over our rollback rate of 5.1281. And if it's the Commission's pleasure, the City Attorney can read it into the record, and we can hear that item first.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, so we have an ordinance providing for the levy of taxes for the fiscal year beginning October 1st, 2024 and ending September 30th, 2025. Fixing the rate of such levy, providing for the segregation and the application of the proceeds of such levy, providing for the separability of the provisions hereof and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1st, 2024. Be it ordained by the City -- by the Commission of the City of Coral Gables that in compliance with the Constitution and laws of the state of Florida as now written, taxation is hereby levied upon all real and personal property within the present corporate limits of the City of Coral Gables for tax year 2024 a tax of 5.5590 mills which is an 8.4 percent increase over the rolled back rate of 5.1281, all proceeds of the collection of this levy to be recorded into the general fund of the City and shall be reserved therein and disbursed transferred therefrom for the sole and express purpose of paying the necessary operating and capital expenditures to the City of Coral Gables, its departments, offices, and properties for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2025. This ordinance requires a four-fifths vote for adoption.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Before we proceed on it, Mayor if I may.

Mayor Lago: Yes, of course.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Before we address the millage rate, I'd like to make a motion so that the provisions that, you know, I should say that staff had suggested for six months from now, you know, the Manager have the ability to bring in some additional positions, that that be -- I'll make a motion for that to be done in an amended budget as opposed to adopted in this budget right now. So, I'll make that motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: Commissioner Anderson...

Commissioner Castro: I'm so sorry, I'm a little confused. What is the motion exactly?

Vice Mayor Anderson: The motion is for the additional positions that staff had suggested during our individual meetings, which we all had, to be done in an amended budget item six months from now as opposed to being addressed by this body at this time.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, I think what the Vice Mayor is referring to is after the first budget hearing, we met with -- at the request of the Commission, we met with each of the Commissioners to discuss the three areas where we were -- so, in the July 1 budget estimate, just for the purpose of the public as well so it's clear to them, in the July 1 budget estimate, we had included an increase of 23 full-time positions and two part-time positions. At the September 12th

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budget hearing, we brought back to you a budget, which is the same budget that we're bringing back to you today, which reduced the new positions that were being added to the budget. So, I want to be very clear, we were not eliminating existing positions. We simply reduced the new positions that were in the original July 1st budget estimate. And so, in our meeting with each of the Commissioners, we discussed the potential of adding back a Solid Waste worker, adding a second Solid Waste Operator II, adding back a new Code Enforcement officer and converting a second part-time enforcement specialist to full-time. So, if I understand the Vice Mayor correctly, what she's proposing is that we consider adding those positions back in, but as an amendment to the budget midway through the fiscal year, not at this time. If that's correct, I just want to make one point for procedure. The first item that has to be passed...

Commissioner Menendez: Millage.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: At this meeting has to be the millage. So, just so that we're...

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I understand, but I put a motion on the floor, and the reason I did so is because I think it is a more orderly way to analyze, you know, position needs because we're going to reanalyze them anyway in six months from now, and I think each and every one of us should have some participation in understanding the needs and how we can better run our city in the best interest of both the residents and the City itself so that we remain a world-class city. I mean, some of the needs were based upon, you know, expected revenues from tickets being issued, expected, you know, leveling out of positions, or you know, revenue increase as well. But there are many operational decisions that we need to make along the way. I think the additional six months would be helpful for staff and for the Manager's Office to be able to analyze these budgetary items. So, yes, that's the motion, you had it correct.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a procedural question. Can we make a motion if the item's not up yet? Because right now it's just the millage ordinance. I think if it's going to be budget related, I think the motion should be made when we actually have the budget item up.

City Attorney Suárez: So, we -- so, you have to adopt the final millage prior to adopting the budget, that's for sure, yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, so I guess I'll make a motion to approve the millage.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion on the floor that was made by the Vice Mayor. Just procedurally, where does that stand?

City Clerk Urquia: We don't have a second for the Vice Mayor's motion, Mr. Mayor.

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Mayor Lago: I'll second it.

Commissioner Fernandez: But there was already a motion and a second.

City Attorney Suárez: Yeah, there was already a motion and a second on the millage ordinance.

Mayor Lago: But we didn't have -- we didn't have an opportunity to at least (INAUDIBLE) a second. I thought there was going to be more discussion. I waited for everybody to finish.

City Attorney Suárez: There was another motion, sir. (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: I was going to wait -- I was going to make a motion. I just wanted to give everybody the courtesy to be able to finish the discussion on that point.

Commissioner Castro: We understand that's what you were going to do, but you didn't. And there's another motion and a second. I'm not opposed to it. I think there's a lot of discussion we can do, and I think it's going to take a little time. I think we need to adopt the millage and then I think we'll all work together as a body to come into an agreement that we all feel comfortable with.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, I think we have to take our votes and move forward.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, you have a motion and a second in regards to the millage rate to adopt the millage.

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor, also do we have any public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: So, typically we would take public comment for the entire meeting, not just for the one vote. So, is that how you want to proceed, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Lago: That's perfectly fine.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker today is David Renshaw.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon, sir.

David Renshaw: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is David Renshaw, business representative at Teamsters Local 769, proudly represents the general employees at City of Coral Gables, the City Beautiful as we know of. I want to speak about two aspects. Aspect number one, about the new proposed full-time slots at 72nd Avenue and Public Works. Yes, we are in need of them. Yes, they are in need of them. They're full-time slots. We do not need or inquire temps or

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part-time employees. And some real-time items that are going on to give you a real-time picture, right? Due to the ongoing staffing issues at 72nd Avenue, at no fault of their own, we are now having an issue of having all of our bargaining committee members attend bargaining sessions so they can service the customers, meaning the residents. That's number one. Number two is why we need additional full-time slots as we previously mentioned with the ongoing heat, as well you now, towards the end of fiscal year, you have long-term employees that have hard-earned accrued vacation time, time off, that now may not be able to take and spend time with their family because there's insufficient staffing. Regarding the suggestion of having some type of electronic cart or carts to assist sanitation, in my opinion, that's not a solution. That is something that the sanitation workers would now have to take extra responsibility for that expensive equipment, haul it, fix it, repair it. I don't think the residents want to have a new machine with a lithium battery to catch on fire of hauling out the trash. A good thought process, but again, this all weighs down to insufficient staffing. My second topic, economics of the City budget, right? Budget preparation, budget authorization, budget execution, and lastly, most important, budget accountability. Remember that, please, budget accountability, as I will be referencing that. As you folks may or may not know, representing the general employees, we are still in ongoing contract negotiations. There are approximately 400 and there is approximately 317 general employees. We shall say, unfortunately, we share the same budget with the executive, the exempt, and the excluded employees of City of Coral Gables. I say unfortunate because there is a vast difference in the percentage when you do a high salary to a lower end salary. The executive and the executive make up 30 percent of the workforce of the joint budget, which absorbs about 70 percent of the entire budget. The 70 percent of the entire budget -- the 70 percent of the workforce is the general employees. And if you do an example of what over 200,000 looks like at 4 percent, break it down by an hourly rate, that's a \$4.08. As compared to a general employee, that's \$1.11. That's 114.45 percent difference from \$4.08 to \$1.11. The reason why I bring this to light is because again, 70 percent of the workforce is only getting approximately 30 percent of the budget. That in my strong opinion is not a fair equity. It is not a fair budget accountability. This is the time to show your general employees the respect that they deserve, that they earn. And just previously stated, just today, we're a world-class city, right? We have world-class general employees. Please. This is the opportunistic moment to take care of them, and this is the time. As I referenced before, it's been on record that there's money. There's a significant amount of money. We're not here to take away from any of the executive employees. I'm not here for that. But what I am here on behalf of the employees, of the general employees, is reconsider and take a look what we have reasonably proposed to get a resolution on behalf of the general employees. Thank you for the extra time.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I am first going to thank David because he really, really expressed what a lot of us feel. In this city, we take good care of people on the top, and we take very poor care of the people at the bottom. I think it's insulting to see when we give raises, when we give benefits, we give looking up, and the people at the bottom get whatever's left. Something is wrong with that. I've said it many times. The problem is that when you give percentages, if you give somebody who's making almost \$200,000 or \$150,000, 10 percent, the increase is significant, is very significant. When you give 10 percent to the people that make pennies, the increase is pennies. And that is wrong. We talk about being a world-class city. Most of our general employees cannot afford to come have dinner in our restaurants. Most of our general employees cannot afford to live in the City. Most of our regular employees cannot benefit from our world-class city. Well, if we're going to call ourselves world-class city, let's start by taking care of all our employees, not the ones on the top only. All our employees, let's take care of them in a fair, equitable way. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Theodore Gibson.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Gibson, how are you, sir?

Theodore Gibson: Good afternoon. Hello, my name is Theodore Gibson. My address is 250 Madison Lane.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Gibson, will you do me a favor? Will you speak into the mic so we can hear you?

Mr. Gibson: My name is Theodore Gibson.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Gibson: My address is 250 Madison Lane, in Coral Gables, Florida.

City Clerk Urquia: Sir, can you raise it up, please?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, I'm sorry.

Commissioner Castro: Under the -- there.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I was just having a little trouble hearing you.

Mr. Gibson: It's okay.

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Vice Mayor Anderson: Don't be shy. We won't bite. I swear.

Mr. Gibson: My question for the council is how does the City accumulate funds for the drainage project, sidewalks, road walk -- I mean, roadway resurfacing and signage for the Golden Gates area and Coral Gables? The reason I'm asking this question is because over the weekend and over several years now when it rains, the entire neighborhood floods. There are terrible roads are causing more damage and maintenance to vehicles for homeowners in the neighborhood. Signage is needed and markings on the roads for a traffic direction, especially when visitors are visiting for the neighborhood, such as school drop-offs and people cutting through the neighborhoods to try to get to US-1 or Le Jeune Road.

Mayor Lago: By the way, thank you for being here. I know members of the Commission, I have gone myself, and when I went to walk the neighborhood, I took the Manager with me, and we addressed, and we saw certain areas that meet the criteria that you discussed. So, I know that our Public Works Director and the Manager were looking into those issues from the parks to, obviously, the garbage cans, the issues with the pavements and the markings and the signage that we saw multiple issues there. So, it's not falling on deaf ears. That's something that we're going to address. It's an item by item issue that we'll be addressing. And you know, if you'd like, we can walk it again with staff. We can walk it again with myself or anyone of the Commissioners who are more than willing to attend. But that's a -- we've had conversations in regards to that. It was about a few months ago when we walked with several of the residents that live in that neighborhood.

Mr. Gibson: Okay. All right. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I may add it was in our legislative priorities last year. It didn't get funded by the state, but it's still high on our priorities to get that area taken care of because I have walked the area too, and I know there are definitely needs there. So, thank you for coming.

Mr. Gibson: All right. Thank you. You all have a good day.

Commissioner Castro: That was an item that was actually vetoed at the end, and it was kind of approved, but then it was vetoed. I believe there was granting -- if Fernando can -- yeah.

Governmental Affairs Manager Weiner: It was vetoed, yeah.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It was...

Commissioner Castro: But now I know because it's stormwater, we're going through a different process. I think it's a grant, right?



Governmental Affairs Manager Weiner: So, we're going to have to look into -- the Department of Environmental Protection is expanding some of their grant programs. We're going to have to see if it's something that falls under those grants, as I've been advised by some of our lobbyists, if it falls under the purview of any of those grant programs, they're unlikely to give us appropriations money for it. So, we'll work with the lobbyists to see if this project, the Golden Gates Project that we had, falls under that, and if so, we can apply through the grant, and if not, it's something that we can seek appropriations for during this year.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, I know we have a large budget, but the dollars, we just can't produce enough of them to cover every project.

Commissioner Castro: Yeah, this is an area that's surrounded by two schools, and I know it's a very high concern, especially because of the children coming in and out.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah.

Commissioner Castro: So, I know if we don't get it granted, we'll push as much as possible coming this year.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Carver Elementary, Carver Middle School. My girls went to Carver Elementary. I'm pretty sure I'm pretty familiar with the area.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Appreciate it very much.

Mr. Gibson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Good to see residents participate in the budget process. It's not very common.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: All right. We'll close public comment. Paula -- Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suárez: So, we have a motion and a second.

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Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: No.

(Vote: 4-1)

Mayor Lago: All right, moving on. Let's move on to the presentation.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, as we've discussed over the last few months, this is the last day of our budget process. So, we're all excited to be at this date. And so, today is September 24th. It is our second budget hearing. We've now passed the millage rate. I'm going to give a brief presentation on our budget and the next item that we have is to adopt the budget for fiscal year 2024-25 and we also have a resolution to adopt the five-year capital plan. So, at our last -- at the first budget hearing, I brought to you the changes from the July 1 budget. As we discussed at the first budget hearing, this slide represents that there have been no changes to the budget that was presented to you on September 12th to the budget that's presented to you today. So, our revenue estimate is \$284,746,946 and our expenditures are at \$284,746,946 and there was no changes between the budget presented on the 12th to the budget that's presented today. I'll recap the rest of the presentation. This is essentially what we saw at the last meeting so unless you have any questions, I'll kind of go quickly just for the purpose of the public. Okay, so the budget includes revenues of \$284,746,946. Sorry, my presentation is not cooperating. Okay. And this is the same breakdown that we saw on September 12th. Revenues include increases in revenue from September -- in the September 12th budget, from the July 1st budget are broken down here. So, you can see the increases were \$18,852,929. And our operating increases from July 1st to September 12th -- sorry, I got thrown off a little bit. So, our operating budget is \$226,489,724. Our capital budget is \$41,563,146, and our debt service budget is \$11,016,090. Transfers to reserve, so these are expenditures, our transfers to reserve are \$87,656, transfer to the City Clerk's special revenue, these are restricted revenues and the general fund building division reserve. Transfer is \$2,490,330, and our parking reserve for capital is \$3.1 million. So, that makes up the total budget of \$284,746,946. The next few slides list the positions that were initially proposed in the July 1 budget, anything that is crossed out and highlighted in green, if you can see that, are the positions -- are new positions that were in the July 1 budget that are not included in this budget. And so, you see here in the City Manager's office, we added a Commission Liaison that remained, in Development Services, we initially added a Code Enforcement Field Supervisor and a Code Enforcement Officer. In this budget, we reduced it by the Code Enforcement Officer and the Field Supervisor remained. In Finance, we converted two part-time Procurement Specialists to one part-time Procurement -- I'm sorry, to one full-time Procurement Specialist. This results in a savings and that remained. In Public Works, we initially added a Maintenance Worker for the sign shop, a part-time Maintenance Worker. That position is not in this proposal. In Solid Waste, on July

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1st, we had initially included one Solid Waste Operator II and two Solid Waste Workers. This budget includes the Operator II and one Solid Waste Worker. We also included a Public Works Inspector for right-of-way and Solid Waste, a part-time position. That position is revenue neutral, and that is included in this budget.

Vice Mayor Anderson: This was a -- what I was referencing on that motion. And I'd ask the Clerk to, you know, to be able to call as soon as you finish going over this page, that we take the vote on this item to defer, you know, looking at any additional positions beyond what you're presenting here until we have a separate amendment to the budget six months from now, so that we can drill down and further analyze the needs.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I'll continue if anybody...

City Attorney Suárez: Are you making a motion again?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm talking about the timing of the motion.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, she wanted me to continue the slides. Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Right.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, in IT, we added an IT Customer Support and GIS Analyst in the July 1 budget. And so, we eliminated in this budget a part-time position to offset the cost of that new position. In Fire, we added five firefighters for the new Firehouse 4. And so, this is the third and final year of a three-year plan to add staffing for firefighters. In Police, we added a Body-worn Camera Analyst. We added five police officers, also the last of a three-year plan to add five police officers each year. In Technical Services, we originally, on July 1, had converted two part-time Police CIC Monitors to full-time, and in this budget, we convert one part-timer to full-time, maintaining one part-timer. In Parking, we also had converted two part-time Enforcement Specialists to two full-time. This budget includes one time -- one part-timer being converted to full-time, maintaining one part-timer. That results in an increase of 19 full-time positions, bringing the total head count for fiscal year '25 in this proposed budget to 921.

City Manager Rojas: Paula, that includes Fire and Police, correct?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: That includes Fire and Police, yes. You want me to continue? The next slides are the capital plan.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, no, I was asking the Clerk to call a vote on that item since we've just finished the explanation. I think it's clearer to analyze at this moment.

Commissioner Castro: Can you go back to the other page?

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Commissioner Fernandez: I guess before we do that, I do have some suggestions that I wanted to make, which do factor in some positions starting later in the year. So, if you'd like to entertain those...

Vice Mayor Anderson: What I'm suggesting is this, for all the positions to factor in later in the year. Let's have a separate meeting, meet with staff, and we can better analyze once we put on board the new positions that we're including here now, how that's playing out, and how we're -- you know, the coverage that we have, and where we need to do some additional tweaking.

City Manager Rojas: May I, for clarification for City staff? There's two ways that I see this going. One is that the Commission approves the headcount, but we don't fill it, or we do a six-month budget adjustment to add the positions and the money for these positions. So, do we add the headcount today and then have the subsequent meeting six months from now to do an adjustment to see if we're going to fill those positions or not add the headcount even though we'd leave it open until we had the meeting?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I would prefer we not add the headcount so that we can, you know, study the issue and look at the needs later on because I prefer not to rush this process. There's a lot happening. We are adding new positions. I'd like to see how they perform, and we can better analyze it down the road.

City Manager Rojas: Thank you for the clarification.

Commissioner Castro: There's certain positions -- and I really want to work with you, but there's just certain positions for Solid Waste. Last week we were down. I know there's overtime payment. We weren't able to do our recycling on Thursday, and we had to wait for Saturday because we were understaffed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, this budget adds positions. We will have those added positions. We will see how that -- the results that we have, okay? And there may be some other adjustments that need to be made down the line on, you know, the performance. We can't forget that I understand they're having problems with recycling and stuff, but there might be some other issues out there that we need to adjust to help with the performance. Okay, so we have a motion, and we have a second.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question. What are the drawbacks to, I think you said, create the position but not fill them, or the Manager did. Is there a drawback to just doing it that way, just create it, but not filling at the moment?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, it's really the will of the Commission. The -- if we were to go the alternate and to add the headcount now and only fund it for starting in the second

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half of the year, that would be equivalent to amending the budget midway down the year, the only drawback could be that if for some reason timing for when we brought an amendment to the Commission would be maybe the starting the hiring process could be a drawback to that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, in doing analysis of how things are performing and whether we need to start a hiring process, I think first we need to do the analysis. You don't start the hiring process until you do the analysis. We already have new positions to fill. We have quite a few new positions to fill. Why don't we see how the engine runs with those new positions? And you know, we can start talking in four months to see how the performance is. We can start talking in five months. We don't have to wait to the last minute. But to add the headcount first assumes, you know, that we're solid on certain issues that haven't been determined yet. And I prefer to be more thoughtful and thorough on the analysis of needs, okay?

Commissioner Castro: If we go back to the page that you were showing us, page number 7. Okay, so in 2023, we had 880 and the difference from -- well, let's start 2022, 855 headcount to 880 in one year, that's 35 new positions. Then if we go ahead and we go down 880 to 902, then our previous City Manager added 22 positions. What's being requested right now is, what is it, 18? No, 19.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: A total of 19.

Commissioner Castro: 19 positions. I don't think the current administration right now is overfilling positions. I think this is pretty accurate given to the previous years. And I'm willing to work with the Vice Mayor, but there's certain positions that I can't negotiate with at this point. Like the Code Enforcement Officer, I think it's very necessary. We spoke about also the parking enforcement, right?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: I think -- I spoke with Monica as well, and I think this is a position that whatever the position is costing, we're making more by having that position. So, it would be a little irrational and not a really smart move not to fund that position.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll respond. It is speculative. We are adding a Parking position. Let's see how it performs, and we can come back to this. So, the conclusion that it's revenue neutral is a speculative position. We don't know until the performance is done. Six months from now, we can add the position if the numbers bear out with the additional Parking Enforcement Officer that's been put in place. So, let's take it a step at a time and keep in mind that what we have to do is what's in the best interest of the residents and the City. If you look at headcount back when Pat Salerno was in and stuff, we were at 829. We're now going to be at 921. The population of the City has, if anything, gone down a little bit, and you know, needs assessments, you know, can be looked at in many different ways. I prefer to be thoughtful and careful and look at the needs. I do

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think we are -- we have enough information in front of us. I don't expect to change your mind. I don't think you're going to change my mind. I think it's time for a vote.

Commissioner Menendez: Can I ask for that page that you had up there a moment? The one with...

Commissioner Castro: Number 7.

Commissioner Menendez: Seven. Looking at that and I see how total number 2019, 2020, '21 pretty much stayed pretty steady. But if I'm not mistaken, the nation and the state locally were impacted by COVID.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: It was the shutdown. So, there's little activity. I don't think anything was happening, including construction of homes. And since then, we've been coming out, and obviously, just have to drive around Coral Gables, you see people fixing up their homes, townhomes going up, you see a bustling downtown. We are -- you know, we all disagree with the count that was made in terms of number of residents today versus a few years ago, but nobody can deny that the city is more active today than it was clearly in 2019, 2020. In fact, I would say the level of activity in our city, in our downtown and residential is something that we've never really seen in many, many years. We need to take into account that. We're no longer a sleepy little town. We're a vibrant town, a vibrant city, and a vibrant part of the country. And I think we need to take that into consideration as we discuss this.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think dovetailing off of that, we just had a discussion earlier today about the need to maybe do mid-decade census of the city because we believe our census numbers that have shown that we've gone down are inaccurate and that our population has actually increased. The other thing that we need to factor in is, and Madam Director, you're here, what is the number of people who come into our city on a daily basis to work? Probably triple the population, 150,000?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: 55,000. So, we more than double our population during daytime hours, and that number has increased, as you said, following COVID. We have the Plaza that's coming online with all of its office spaces and numerous other development projects that have been completed in the city. And that's continuing to tax our current employees and the ability to provide services. Some of these positions, Code Enforcement. We've gotten to the point where we've had to designate Code Enforcement Officers just to the Central Business District because of the issues that we're having in the CBD. And for the most part, we're not talking about resident issues, we're talking about issues that are being created from folks that are moving -- are coming to the city

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during the daytime. Same with our police. We've had the bike patrol in downtown, which was added because there was a need in the downtown. Parking enforcement is specifically addressing this need. We're dealing with traffic enforcement -- parking enforcement, I'm sure all of you met with Director Beltran about this. The schools in the morning are requiring four of our Parking Enforcement Officers out there patrolling and making sure that people are not parking in areas they're not parking in. That is relieving the stress that would be applied on the Police Department if we didn't have those enforcement officers. What's happening? When you have those enforcement officers out by the schools, you're reducing the revenue the City is generating from enforcement in the pay-to-park zones in downtown and in other parts of the city. We've also had numerous requests from residents because there's people parking in no parking zones. We have no parking zones almost at least every three or four blocks throughout the city. Those enforcement officers are actively out there in the community, driving sometimes 20 minutes to get to a place where a car is illegally parked, and we're leaving the Central Business District, which is where we're generating the revenue. I had the conversation with the director, and I know that the Budget Director didn't really want to give us a number of what each of these Parking Enforcement positions really represents, but the fact is it would more than pay for itself in the revenue that it generates. As far as Code Enforcement, you can make the argument that those Code Enforcement positions, when they're applying fines, are also generating revenue for the City. And they are positions that are needed now. I met with the Code Enforcement Manager and with Director Ramirez, and I asked him, I was like, you know, do you need the additional resources? And both of them said yes, it's something that is needed in the department. And I told Mr. Leor (phonetic), I was like, we cannot sit on the dais and say we have issues with code enforcement in this city if we're not providing the necessary number of personnel to address the code enforcement issues we have in the city. I mean, arguably, as I said last time, our best Code Enforcement Officer is sitting here on the dais, and it shouldn't be his responsibility to be out there sending code enforcement issues to staff because we don't have enough personnel to man all the zones. We have two Code Enforcement Officers piggybacking off of each other on weekends to patrol the entire City of Coral Gables. I know all of us have campaigned and have knocked on doors from the Flagler Section all the way down to Kings Bay. Code enforcement in an entire city, having one officer manning the entire city in a day, makes it very difficult. You're going to have things fall through the cracks. I mean, as I mentioned, I think I mentioned it during the meeting. We had construction taking place across from the Biltmore Hotel on a Sunday. And the Code Enforcement Officers had not even been able to patrol that area. And that's arguably, Anastasia, is a main thoroughfare in the city. So, I think the need is there for some of these positions, not six months from now, it was a need six months ago. So, I understand, and I do think that there are positions that we can hold back. You know, Solid Waste, there is a need in Solid Waste. However, do we need to fill those positions today? The proposal that I'm planning and presenting will fill two positions in April, right before the summer, which is when we have the most taxing season. And it could be funded out of the money that we already have set aside for temporary workers, which, as I heard from staff, sometimes are not reliable. They have other jobs that come up, they have other responsibilities that come up, and it's like, you know, do I go on a Friday to work in Coral Gables or do I take a construction job that's going to pay me twice as much this one day because I'm a

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temporary worker? Having those workers in-house ensures that we have our fully manned teams. And the numbers that were discussed with me, I mean, you're talking about having a need to assess these positions. I think that staff has done a very thorough job, at least they did with me during my meeting, where they explained what the needs are based on manhours produced, leave time for each position, the actual demand, the actual on-street hours that are being put in. And you can make the case that you need the two Solid Waste Operator II positions, and you need three Solid Waste Operators. And that's based on the current numbers that we have today. That's not changing anything, that's just the current need that we have in the City today. And even still, I'm willing to put two of those positions towards an April funding, creating the positions and funding those two positions in April so that there's enough time. Obviously, we fund those positions today, they're not going to be hired by October 1st. It's going to take some time. We do hire some of our temporary workers as our full-time workers, but just saying we're going to freeze everything that we have decided to have a discussion about. Just let's kick the can down the road to March and figure it out. I don't think some of these positions and some of these departments can really wait. And at the end of the day, we do answer to residents. And when garbage is not picked up or recycling is not picked up, residents don't care what the body count in the City is, they care that their service was provided. And I think that has to be our priority, ensuring that our departments, everybody in this room has the resources and the manpower necessary to ensure that, at the end of the day, their department gets a checkmark saying you guys did a great job because you provided the services to our residents.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, it's clear you misunderstood my motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, that's what I said. When you first made it, I said I don't understand what you're trying to do.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so a lot of assumptions have been made and I'm sorry you misunderstood. There are positions that were put on hold here that staff, during our individual meetings, suggested if someone was going to make a motion, that we add the positions and hire them six months from now. I'm saying let's analyze it, and those additional positions, we'll meet with the Manager, and we'll meet with staff. We can have real-time performance figures on them. You will have additional people in Solid Waste. You will have additional Code Enforcement people out there, and we can see how they're performing. You will have the people on the ground doing the right-of-way inspection. You know, you have the IT Specialist, you have the CIT Monitor, and we'll have additional parking enforcement. And we can see what the revenues are. And rather than speculate, now we'll have actual hard figures in hand. So, instead of voting on those additional positions to be hired in six months today, we can vote on them a few months from now. Let's look at some real-time production. Let's see how, you know, after we get them hired, what the performance is and where there might be gaps. We might need to shift it around a little bit, but we'll have a more intelligent way to analyze something if we wait. There's no rush. What's the rush? You're going to wait six months anyway.

Commissioner Castro: Is that even a possibility when it comes to your budget?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, I think for my clarity I'll make sure that I clarify the Vice Mayor's motion. So, the proposed budget includes the addition of 19 full-time positions. In our discussions after the first hearing, we went back, and we discussed some specific positions. And so, we discussed the Code Enforcement Officer which had been removed from the July 1 estimate. We had discussed an additional Solid Waste Operator II. We had discussed putting back in the Solid Waste -- an additional Solid Waste Worker.

Commissioner Fernandez: Hold on.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, let's -- all right. So, before we get to the positions...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: Before I start writing, you know, so that I understand this, the proposal is to leave everything as is with the consideration of doing a midyear review in four months.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, we can do a midyear review. Let's see what the performance is because we've got to hire the positions, we've got to put them on the ground, and then we've got to look at the performance figures from there in order to assess needs. The needs might be different once we get people on the ground.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, okay, so I guess in essence, your motion is to approve the budget as is with these positions being reconsidered in four months?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Right, to come back with a budget amendment in four months or...

Commissioner Fernandez: Right, because...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Before the...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Four months or six months, whatever it takes staff to do...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Before the midyear, whatever.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Do these analyses.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right, so now let's go to making the list of what those positions are so that I understand what the positions are.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, the positions that we discussed, and so you'll tell me which ones or all of them, right? So, the positions that we specifically discussed because there was concern of us not including them in the budget was the Code Enforcement Officer, which had originally been included in the July 1 estimate, a Solid Waste Operator II, so this would be a second Solid Waste Operator II because one is included in this estimate. One Solid Waste Worker, which we had included in the July 1 estimate and had reduced. And then converting a second part-time Parking Enforcement position to full-time. Those are the specific positions we had discussed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Correct.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, that's three positions.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Four.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Four.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Code Enforcement, Operator II, Solid Waste Worker, and converting a part-time to full-time.

City Manager Rojas: But you also had administrative in the, for example, the CIC monitoring. There's other positions beyond the...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, we had not talked about those in our briefings, but we had also reduced the Parking CIC Monitor. So, the second Parking CIC Monitor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, that's not Parking CIC.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: I'm saying...

Commissioner Fernandez: Please, please, please.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's still a P though. It's in the P category.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: And then we had also reduced the part-time Maintenance Worker in the sign shop.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question regarding the sign shop. And I had mentioned before that I had once a situation where a stop sign at night was -- disappeared, actually. And then recently a stop sign was knocked over. Same stop sign, just so happens, I guess, I'm the stop sign whisperer.

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And I called it in. I just want to make sure that when we have situations like that that need a rapid response in terms of get signage up, that we -- with the number of people we have currently, we have the capability to respond to those types of situations because it's a safety issue. Imagine an intersection with no stop sign. I don't know if someone can address...

City Manager Rojas: Commissioner, if I may.

Commissioner Menendez: Yeah.

City Manager Rojas: If a stop sign is down, that's a life-safety issue. The Police Department has temporary stop signs. They will respond and set it up, and then we will report it to the County, Most of the stop signs belong to the County, just like the striping and all the other signs other than 50 mile an hour speed limit and the no parking signs, but we'll report it right away.

Commissioner Menendez: Do we have the temporary, they're made of metal, do we have those already created?

City Manager Rojas: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay. That's the key for me. If they have to be created as a result of someone reporting it, I just want to make sure.

City Manager Rojas: I think -- I don't know the numbers, but I see them on the second floor of the garage.

Police Chief Hudak: Yes, sir, we do. We have two sets of different signs. We have actually cones with a sign for residential areas where you're not having it. And then we have the larger metal signs that are taken out about four and a half feet tall. And they're ready to go in a trailer that we just acquired from last year.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you, Chief.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, and just -- I think your concern is regarding the creation of that position. What I was told by staff is with the current, I think there's another position that's being added, we are creating a second team already. So, this position would have been auxiliary to that team, but we're already creating a team.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Right.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, this position, you know, again, could be reconsidered later on.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Right, so in the current budget the department was able to identify another part-time position within their department that they reallocated to the sign shop that allowed them to create a second team. They currently only have one. I don't know if they've hired that second, that new position yet. And so, this would have allowed them to go to a third team. And so, kind of to the Vice Mayor's point, while we evaluate how the second team is working out, we can determine whether we need to go to a third team in the future. And that was our thought process in changing our recommendation.

Commissioner Menendez: Perfect, thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I don't know how the rest of the Commission feels, but I cannot accept delaying these positions for an analysis. These are positions that we don't need to analyze if we need them. We need them. We needed them six months ago. So, once again -- and we shouldn't even be talking about the parking -- the Parking Enforcement Specialist. After speaking to Monica, this is going to like triple the revenue that's coming to us. So, this could be a really bad move for us not to even hire this person. So, yes, there's not an exact number of the incoming revenue, but without there being an exact number, there's a guarantee that this position creates more revenue. So, that would be a very...

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, we can see what happens in six months because we're adding one, okay? So, I think -- does anybody else have any other questions, or are we ready to proceed with a vote?

Commissioner Fernandez: Again, I have a proposal that I'd like to make, but if you want to proceed with a vote on this and then consider it, I'm okay with doing that.

Commissioner Menendez: I think...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's keep the meeting moving.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: You have a mo...

Commissioner Castro: Yeah, I want to reach a healthy medium, but this is not the healthy medium for me, no.

Commissioner Fernandez: There are a couple of positions that I think can wait. There are a couple that I cannot, so I'm going to say no, but I think my proposal might address some of your concerns.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to hear what everyone has to say in terms of options that we have. So, I'll vote no now and hope that we can revisit it as the meeting progresses.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 2-3)

Mayor Lago: All right, moving on.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, so I guess -- well, let's let you finish your presentation. You haven't even finished your presentation. I was going to present mine, but...

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: We can certainly finish my presentation, and at some point, the City Attorney will have to read the budget ordinance, and anything that is changed in the budget will need to be an amendment to the...

Mayor Lago: That's what I'm trying to do, trying to get there.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, I will continue. Am I still sharing my screen?

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're showing.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, the next couple of slides we've seen throughout the budget process. This is the five-year priority project funding plan for the capital. And so, as you know, in fiscal year 2023, when we received a significant increase in our property values, the City made the choice to put that funding towards funding capital projects. At the time, the projects that were identified were Firehouse 4, Phillips Park, Ponce Circle Park, City Hall, the Gondola Building, the Venetian Pool, and the Alhambra Water Tower. And so, you see at the time in fiscal '23, anything that's highlighted in green was fully funded in fiscal year '23. The commitment was to put at least \$5 million into this plan each year. And so, in fiscal '24, we once again funded that plan, and so you'll see the general recurring funding that was put towards that plan in fiscal year '24 was just over \$6.5 million. Some of that money came in through appropriations and so you see that we funded Phillips Park, City Hall, Venetian Pool, and the Alhambra Water Tower, as well as some grant money that we received for Firehouse 4. Fiscal year '25, our commitment was to fully fund Phillips Park, so we are funding 4.7, just under \$4.8 million towards Phillips Park. And so, based on our current estimates, this will fully fund that project. And we're putting \$1.3 million to City Hall. And so, on July 1, that estimate was just over \$1 million, so \$1,040,000. Since then, we added an additional \$260 million [sic] to get to the \$1.3 million. The majority of that is going towards the windows and the difference is going towards the structural assessment

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needs. And this plan will continue, the idea is to continue this plan through '26 and '27. And all of the funding for this plan will go to City Hall in the future years, unless something changes. And so, that's the plan. The plan was also to incrementally increase it to potentially \$6.5 million if revenues are available at that time. And so, this is our list of capital projects that we funded by category. And so, capital equipment, we funded just under \$3.2 million. Facility projects, we funded just over \$3.5 million. Historic facilities, we funded just over \$2.6 million. Anything highlighted in green changed from the July budget estimate, and so you see City Hall changed as I just mentioned. Motor pool, funding \$3.6 million in replacement of equipment and vehicles. Parking repairs, \$2.8 million, Parks and Recreation and improvements, just over \$9.6 million. And you see here we discussed at the last hearing that an increase was made to purchase of land and the Mayor Dorothy Thomson Park, also known as Toledo and Alava, which required additional funding to complete that project. Public safety improvements, we're funding just under \$3.5 million. Transportation and right-of-way improvements, just over \$6 million. Utility repairs and improvements, we're funding just over \$10 million, and you see that there were some changes in the allocation of funds between these particular projects that are highlighted. And so, the total new funding for our CIP, including the vehicle replacements, is \$45,191,015. We already discussed that the millage rate is being maintained at 5.559. This is a breakout. This chart breaks out how our city residents tax dollars is allocated. And so, City of Coral Gables receives 30 cents per tax dollar that the residents pay. Dade County receives 32 cents per tax dollar of our residents' tax bill. The School Board receives 36 cents per tax dollar and our regional is just about two cents. And so, that's all the presentation that I have today. And so, as we mentioned, we have the budget ordinance to adopt. Any amendments will need to be amended on the floor. And then we'll also have a resolution to accept our capital projects plan.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Paula, I appreciate it. Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, Mayor. So, we have an ordinance adopting the annual budget of estimated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year beginning October 1st, 2024 and ending September 30th, 2025; providing for the separability of the provisions hereof and providing that this ordinance shall become effective October 1st, 2024. Whereas the City Manager prepared and on July 1st, 2024, submitted to the Commission a budget estimate of the revenues and expenditures of all City departments, divisions, offices, and properties for the fiscal year commencing October 1st, 2024, and copies of such estimate have been made available for public viewing at the Coral Gables Library and the Office of the City Clerk. And whereas the budget estimate submitted to the Commission on July 1st, 2024, in the amount of \$283,480,289 has been revised by the City Manager to include revenue and expenditure increases in the amount of \$1,266,657, bringing the total budget amount to \$284,746,946. That the following summary of estimated revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year commencing October 1st, 2024 and ending September 30th, 2025 is hereby agreed upon and adopted along with the supporting data relating thereto on file with the Finance Department of the City of Coral Gables as the official 2024 to 2025 budget of the City of Coral Gables. Total operating revenues, \$265,894,017. Total transfers from reserves, \$18,852,929. Total revenues, \$284,746,946. Estimated expenditures for all operating

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departments, capital and debt service. Total operating expense, \$226,489,724. Capital projects, \$41,563,146. Total debt service appropriation, \$11,016,090. Total expenditures, \$284,746,946.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Madam City Attorney. What is the will of the Commission?

Commissioner Fernandez: All right. All right. So, these are -- I sat down with staff numerous times. Oh, I thought I had made another one.

Commissioner Castro: Oh, there's an extra one here.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think that's the City Attorney's.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right. So, I took -- and by the way, you laid a lot of the groundwork for this, and I appreciate the work that you put in trying to find places where we can make the budget leaner. One of the commitments that I made during the first budget hearing was not touching the money that we were moving towards City Hall, because I think we all agreed City Hall renovations was a priority. So, I sat down with staff, and I found a few ways that we can make some changes. So, this is what I'm proposing. We would remove the \$65,000 from the 4th of July drone show, which is one of the things you had proposed in your proposal. We'd be taking \$100,000 from the City Attorney's Office professional services budget, which is outside counsel. I spoke with the City Attorney and she and I agreed that that was something that her office could definitely work with. There was an error in the automobile allowance in her office as well, \$6,000. We would remove the part-time Assistant Commission Liaison position, the part-time Parking Enforcement Specialist position, the Administrative Assistant to the Mayor, and we would move \$40,000 from the temporary Solid Waste Worker fund, which we use for Solid Waste to fill temporary positions. That was a suggestion that came from staff for a total reduction of \$335,571.72. And then we would create the additional Solid Waste Operator position that staff believes is necessary. We would add the two Solid Waste Worker positions, but we would not fund it until April 1st. So, it would give enough time for a proper hiring process, and it would have them trained and operating by the summer, which is when we have the largest need. We would create the Parking Enforcement Specialist, which is another position I am willing to fund beginning in April, halfway through the year. We would create the Code Enforcement Officer position that was necessary. We would have two Commission Liaisons so that every member of the Commission would have one staff member assigned to them and any additional funding that is left from the 335 or the estimated \$335,000 would also go towards City Hall renovations. These numbers are estimated numbers as I went over with the director, and she was not very happy that I was putting numbers on here because there's different implications to the numbers. But I kind of wanted to give you an idea that doing it this way would work, and we would be able to create and fill the positions. The other thing is the Parking Enforcement Specialist, that's a position that comes out of the Parking budget, does not come from the general fund, so it would not have an

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impact. So, arguably, there would be more money going towards City Hall renovations than the \$31,000 estimate that is in here. Again, so we would be adding the two Solid Waste positions, which staff believes are necessary already, and they definitely will be necessary going into summer, which is where we have the largest number of heat-related injuries and people having to stay home because they're being overtaxed because of the heat. And those would not be funded until April 1st, so in six months. So, open for comments?

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I know you previously brought a matter to decrease the staffing in the Mayor's Office, which I had opposed, and increase staffing for the Commissioners. Again, I think it's helpful to look at numbers and volume in order to analyze need for positions. Based upon -- you know, and the Clerk shared with me earlier today the number of emails that each one of us receive and send. By far, the Mayor eclipses all of us. And I don't think we should because it's not in the best interest of our city or the appearance of our city or for the residents to handicap the Mayor's Office, no matter who's sitting in there, to be able to perform. So, let's look at the numbers in the past three months. The number of emails that were sent from the Mayor's Office over a three-month period were 13,851, okay? The number of emails I sent, which, you know, weren't as much as the Mayor's Office, were 4,697 that were sent to me. Each one of the other Commissioners received less. Commissioner Castro, 1,792. Commissioner Fernandez, 2,128. And Commissioner Menendez, 1,559 compared to 13,851. That was where those -- excuse me, I got this inverted. 13,000 compared to a much smaller number. These were -- sorry, Mr. Clerk, you had it inverted. The from Mayor's Office was 13,000, but on each one of us the from was inverted, the to's. The Mayor's Office received, in a three-month period, 49,187 emails. That's 16,395 a month that were sent to the Mayor's Office. I received 4,697. Commissioner, you received 2,200 -- 2,128. With that volume, no human being can be responsive to the residents and responsive to the city without having adequate staffing. If anybody needs the staffing, if any office needs the staffing, it's the Mayor's Office. Now, I've been used to functioning as a lawyer with one assistant my entire career, okay? And I don't think that I've pulled time away from the Commission aides that has made it not possible for the rest of us to function because we have to work as a team. And I hope that we can continue to try to strive to work as a team. But what I'm seeing here is not working as a team. It's handicapping the Mayor's Office. I don't think that's going to be what's in the best interest of our city going forward. No one would want to run for that office with that degree of handicap. After all, everybody wants to email the Mayor if there's an issue in the city. They want to hear from the Mayor's Office because that is the Mayor's Office, and we shouldn't deprive folks of that. If we're going to -- I don't see the need for our offices to have additional Commission aides. I would much more justify the need for additional sanitation workers based upon the data that I've received, but I don't see sufficient data here to warrant adding two more Commission aides on top of the two that we already have.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, quantifying the work produced by an office just in emails? I mean, you can receive 49,000 emails, and if you're subscribed to 100 different newsletters, and they're sending one out a week, you're going to be getting a lot of emails. I've gone through the emails. A lot of them were not emails that needed to be acted on. They're also emails that are forwarded

to other people or themselves, personal email addresses. So, I don't think that that number necessarily means work being produced. I also looked at the phone calls. There's a lot of internal phone calls. It wasn't, you know, calls to residents as it was being portrayed to us. In fact, most of the call logs linked to City staff. I am open to keeping that position, but I do think that every member of this Commission needs somebody working with them because of the amount of work, and you said it, the Mayor's Office produces a lot of work, your office produces a lot of work, we all do. And we are strapped in our ability because there are not enough hours in the day to get things done, to follow up with residents, to follow up with staff, to make sure that things are being done on time. And I have gone to staff, and I've been told we're working on a time-sensitive project for the Vice Mayor. So, yes, there are times where we're all consuming their time so much that they're not able to get projects done for the rest of us in a timely manner. I do see the need. I do see the need because the Commission is always -- we hear out there, oh, this is a part-time job. I know each one of us is putting in over 40 hours a week because I see you here, I see you here, I see all of us here all the time, whether it's here at City Hall, whether it's events in the community, we're putting in the time, we all are. And you're right, I have no problem keeping the position. I was trying to find a way to ensure that we all had the assistance that we had without affecting the budget. So, I'm willing to work with you. If you want to keep that position, we can find some other way to do it. But to say that we don't need the help, I don't know, I just don't see it personally.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I've had one time sensitive project.

Commissioner Fernandez: It's happened three times.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No one said anything to me about it.

Commissioner Castro: Sunshine.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And guess what?

Commissioner Fernandez: I am not at liberty to ask for what that project is...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I wrote the...

Commissioner Fernandez: Because of the Sunshine. And I think that also creates an issue because you have people who are now working for more than one member of the Commission.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You know, and we can work as a team. We have a broad, robust number of employees in the City that help each other and can pitch in. When it comes around to budgetary items, we have a Budget Office. When we have finance questions, we can go to Finance. If we have legal questions, we go to the Legal Office. But I, frankly, don't see the need for an individual

Commission aide for each and every one of us. I'd rather put that money into other departments that need the money, that need the positions more.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to comment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: By the way, I do all my own writing. I don't need anybody else to do the writing for me, other than the Legal Department does that writing, but if it's a letter, it's a memo and stuff, I get a little bit of -- you know, they do the formatted stuff. If it's a payment for something on postage or something going out, fine. But the bricks and mortar of the letters, I write, okay? Where are you going to put all these people? That's another issue.

Commissioner Fernandez: We have office space available.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We do?

Commissioner Fernandez: We do, because we're not adding the number of positions. We have the office that's down at the end of the hall, which is a larger office, and it has two desks in it.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're talking about the Mayor's Office?

Commissioner Fernandez: The Mayor's assistant's office, correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so you're going to have the Commission aides in the Mayor's office.

Commissioner Fernandez: Or we move everybody to the central office where the vestibule is, and we can move maybe Commissioner Castor to the other office.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Which other office?

Commissioner Fernandez: The one across from the Mayor. And all staff can be in one place. I mean, there's solutions.

Commissioner Menendez: So, I want to chime in on the assistants. And from my own experience, there have been things that I have -- that I need done or I want done and I lean heavily on the amazing team that we have of support. They are fantastic. And I hold back because I know they're serving not only the work that I'm doing as a Commissioner, but they're working for my colleagues. And out of courtesy, I'll say, no, no, no, we'll do A, B and C, but we'll wait until a week after the Commission meeting, because I know everything builds up towards the Commission meeting, whatever memos need to be done, whatever needs to be done. So, we're looking at it backwards. Some of us are saying, well, we don't need it. Well, technically, I think we do because our staff needs it. They're juggling many plates at the same time. We're in here talking about, oh, I do this, and I do that, but they're balancing all our responsibilities and all our

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needs and it's on them. And I think if they have the ability to work more efficiently and they're doing an amazing job already, we can work more efficiently. It serves the community much better because instead of waiting, we can move on real time on a lot of issues, a lot of things that we want to do to support and enhance the service that we do to the community. So, from the perspective of adding -- relieving the burden on staff, I'm all for it. And I think -- talked about Sanitation, Code Enforcement. Their employees, they serve the community, and they serve the City as well. So, I am for looking for solutions to relieve the burden. We're talking about the Mayor and the number of emails. I'm open too to find a solution there. We shouldn't be up here adding burden to staff. We should be looking for ways to relieve some of the burden so that we can all do a better job.

Commissioner Castro: Yeah, as far as for me, I throw so many things towards my Commission aides that sometimes I ask, is it too much? Can you handle it? Last night, I believe Gabby was here till late working on something for me. And she was working on other things for my other colleagues. And this morning, I was like, till like the last moment when I was talking about, is the flyer ready? They were working on the presentation for the Vice Mayor, and they were working on a thousand other things that I'm throwing at them. The more things that I can throw at them, the better I can serve the community and the more that each of us can do. If -- I'm not used to working as a one-man team, usually in my private business, have an assistant that goes with me to meetings, that takes notes, that does follow-ups. I'm the brain, I generate the money, right? I feel the same way here in the City. I can function. I know the petty little things, our Commission needs can take care of. But the real big thinking to improve the quality of life for the community, that's what we got elected to do. Not to do little happy birthday cards and send this and send that. The Commission aides can do that. And pictures and Instagram, that's so time consuming. I would really benefit, and thank you for bringing this up, for a Commission aide of my own. It's hard as it is, and I am throwing a lot of things at them.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right, so I'm going to make a change.

City Attorney Suárez: Can I just --? If I may, can I just add one point? If the will of the Commission is to fund these positions so that each Commissioner has a liaison, that's fine. But I do want to say that we would have to look at how we structure those positions and the reporting structures and to avoid any potential issues with, you know, the Charter, Sunshine Law, et cetera. So, we would have to figure out, you know, the selection process and so forth. All of that would have to be worked out. I just wanted to make sure that's clear.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right. So, based on the numbers that I had, we had \$31,000 left over, and I had talked about potentially making that Parking Enforcement Specialist funding it in April, which is \$25,000. That gives us the funding to keep the administrative assistant to the Mayor. So, I will make a motion to approve the budget with these changes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I just wanted, for the purpose of the public to understand, and those sitting here, we just added an additional Commission aide about 30 days ago, roughly speaking. You know, and I, in order to do a proper analysis, I think you need to allow that person to get up to speed and be able to produce and analyze it at that time.

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion.

Commissioner Castro: And for the Parking Enforcement Specialist, I see what you're trying to do. I just -- I'm thinking numbers.

Commissioner Fernandez: Because remember, we are adding a Parking Enforcement Specialist already. So, this would just add the second one midyear, gives time for proper hiring.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: And it would be the two Solid Waste Workers also midyear. And staff was okay with that. I don't know if Parking...

Commissioner Castro: That's what I was just going to...

Commissioner Fernandez: Director Beltran says...

Commissioner Castro: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: She's fine with that change as well.

Commissioner Castro: I was going to actually, through the Manager, if maybe she can come up and see if -- we're talking about revenue and we're talking about money. Do you think it's in the best interest of the City to hold off that position? Do you think we'll be making money or --? You see where I'm coming from or no?

Parking Director Beltran: I do. Good afternoon, Monica Beltran, Parking Director. So, I do, and I know that the more we enforce -- and I don't know if any of you have gotten comments from residents and other -- and visitors, but I certainly have about, oh, my God, they're everywhere, right? Because we're working very efficiently. Now, one thing that we also need to remember is a lot of construction, a lot of construction workers trying to park on the streets, impacting. We're doing that, too. Okay, that doesn't generate as much money because when we enforce the meters, then it motivates people to pay. And so, the effect is not on the citation but on the revenue as well. That being said, we're a team, and if I get one -- remember, we're converting part-time to full-time, right? And so, if I get one now and we get the other one in April and that works, we'll make it work. We'll make anything work. It's just how efficient we are and how proactive we can be as opposed to being reactive.

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Commissioner Castro: I have no doubt you're going to make it work. I don't think this is like -- I don't think this is a life-changing change. I'm just thinking money-wise and revenue. Will we make more money? Would more revenue come in if we hire that one? It's not going to be in October because we're going to have to go through an application process, interview. Realistically, we'll probably end up hiring them two months, eight, ten weeks.

Parking Director Beltran: If we're lucky. We scheduled interviews, and when you schedule five, six people, you get one or two to show up. Okay, so we're competing. You know, we have enforcement officers throughout all of Miami-Dade County and Broward, and we're competing. So, you're correct. We haven't been fully staffed in, I don't know how long. We're not fully staffed now. And it's just an effort to hire, right? We're covering some positions, I must say, with overtime from the savings. It's not the ideal way to do it, but we make it work.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right, I met with -- I spoke with Paula a second. My numbers actually aren't 100 percent accurate because parking enforcement does not come out of the general fund.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, we technically should have enough between the contingency that there was here and the additional funds to keep the administrative assistant to the Mayor and create the Parking Enforcement position. So, I will amend my motion, and I guess, let me read it into the record so that it's easier. We would remove the \$65,000 for the July 4th drone show. We would remove \$100,000 from the City Attorney's Office professional services. We would make the correction to the City Attorney's Office automobile allowance, which is approximately \$6,000. We would remove the part-time Assistant Commission Liaison position. We would remove the part-time Parking Enforcement Specialist and switch it to a park -- a full-time Parking Enforcement Specialist. We would remove \$40,000 from the temporary Solid Waste Worker fund. We would create the second Solid Waste Operator position. The -- add the two Solid Waste Worker -- additional two Solid Waste Worker positions, funding them April 1st. Create the Parking Enforcement Specialist position that we just discussed, the Code Enforcement Officer position that was also requested, the two Commission Liaisons, and any additional funding that may be available from these changes would go towards City Hall renovations. So, that's my motion.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Fernandez?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

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City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Menendez?

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Vice Mayor Anderson?

Vice Mayor Anderson: For the reasons I explained, no.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Castro?

Commissioner Castro: And realistically, with this proposal, we're also going to be saving a little more because we're not going to actually hire on October 1st. So, there's going to be some saving in revenue, in positions, right?

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, as the...

Commissioner Castro: A delay in hiring.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Right, so we will not -- the likelihood of hiring everybody on October 1st is very unlikely. The numbers that the Commissioner mentioned are estimates. So, when I go back and adjust the budget, they will slightly move, but yes, it will not be the full cost for these positions because they will not start on October 1st.

Commissioner Castro: And most of that money that we will be saving will go back to the general fund.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: So, they will -- so, it will result in salary savings in the department, and it'll drop to the fund balance at the end of the year or be absorbed by overtime if it's used and it's placed.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor Lago?

Commissioner Fernandez: Before I give my vote, I'd like to just give a brief speech for the record. I cannot support the 2024-2025 budget for several critical reasons that impact both the financial stability of our city, and the trust placed in us as elected officials. Firstly, I would like to note that this is a national election year, and because of uncertainty of the state of our economy, we should be conservative in our spending. I will always continue to advocate for conservative spending, not more aggressive. Now is not the time to expand our financial obligations, especially in light of the uncertainty surrounding the broader economy. Lowering interest rates is done to avoid a

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recession. It's simple economics. Everyone here understands that. Currently, outstanding principal on all debt in the City is \$106,793,000, and outstanding interest on all debt is \$37,080,462. Recently, there was a discussion and letter of intent to study the acquisition of \$40 million, potentially, of debt via legislation that was voted three to two, which I and the Vice Mayor voted against. In early 2022, there was a discussion spearheaded by Commissioner Menendez about going out to debt -- I voted against it -- to fund a parks master plan in an estimated amount of \$160 million, of which \$43 million was proposed for the Youth Center and \$5 million was proposed for Phillips Park. Thank God this never passed. We discussed this extensively because I do not believe that we should acquire bonds for beautification efforts, only for essential services like public safety and infrastructure. Beautification, while beneficial, is not essential, and using debt for such purposes is reckless and could lead to a long-term financial strain. Moreover, I cannot support a budget that includes over 100 percent pay increases for my colleagues for a second year, approved without sufficient transparency. The process by which these raises were enacted lacked the public input necessary for such significant decisions. Raises of this magnitude should not have been brought to the vote -- should have been brought to the voters as they affect not only our budget, but also the public's perception of integrity as their representatives. Case in point, the leader of the union who's here and continues to say there's money, that we should be able to spend it. If we're raising our salaries by 102 percent, the least we can do is raise our employee salaries. I also want to address the misinformation regarding job cuts. There have been unfounded claims that we are eliminating positions. Let me repeat that. Unfounded claims that we're eliminating positions, which is simply not true. We are proposing to reduce the number of new positions being added, not existing ones. It is important to correct the record and ensure that this budget is understood accurately, since blogs like Political Cortadito and Gables Insider have published inaccurate information to misguide readers. I've received the phone calls asking me why are we cutting positions? We're not. We're considering cutting proposed positions, which as you can see was done in plain sight here. And I asked Paula before our meeting to be very thoughtful and diligent and careful when mentioning that statement because it's important for the readers. And finally, you know, being mayor is a privilege, but it's a difficult task. I've had -- when I took the office, I had one permanent individual in my office and an assistant. When I took my office, that's the way it was, confirmed by our staff who's here today. I didn't add these positions. These positions were here before. Do I believe that my colleagues on the Commission deserve their own individuals? I have no issues with that. Do they deem it appropriate, and they have the workload and it's in their conscience to ask for that? I don't have a problem with it whatsoever. But I have to correct the record on Ariel Fernandez's comments, the Commissioner's incorrect. He talks about, you know, magazines, and you know, some sort of, you know, weekly emails or monthly emails from different subscriptions in the hundreds. I have stayed quiet in today's Commission meeting, and I've stayed quiet here today. I don't need to be derogatory. The facts speak for themselves. Mr. Clerk, please put the item up on the screen.

City Clerk Urquia: One second, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Not a problem, take your time.

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City Clerk Urquia: If Cable TV could share my screen?

Mayor Lago: What you see here today is a breakdown of every elected official. We use emails because emails is a good way to track things. If you want to look at legislation, just pull up all the record, and you'll see that I've written more legislation than anyone in this Commission. Here is a very simple example of emails that are given -- that are sent and that are given. My office has provided -- has either written or received 63,000 emails. That's my office. I'm not sending emails to myself. There are emails that are being -- coming in and a lot of emails that are going out. Yes, there are spam emails that we don't respond to. That's why you see 13,851 emails. But if you look at Commissioner Fernandez, and I like to use him as an example, because he was so vocal in opposition, he's written in three months, 224 emails. That's an average of two emails a day in comparison to 13,851 emails that I've written with my staff. I cannot answer all of the residents. I cannot answer all the businesses. We have to address ribbon cuttings. We have to address other issues around Miami-Dade County, and it is truly a privilege to serve this community. My comment is very simple. What Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Menendez, and Commissioner Castro are doing is very simple. They're hurting the Office of Mayor in order to hurt me. And that's reckless and shameful. For all of these reasons, fiscal responsibility, transparency, and a commitment to maintaining the essential functions of government without unnecessary expansion or spending, I cannot support this year's budget. So, my vote is no.

(Vote: 3-2)

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I think you did not understand what we just voted on because we kept the position in your office. Now if you'd like, I'd do a motion to reconsider and remove it because if you're going to accuse your colleagues of doing something, might as well have done it. But in order to put the City first and at the Vice Mayor's request, and your office's request, we kept the position. But it's all attack with you. It's all attack with you. By the way, you do send emails to yourself. And Mr. Clerk, can you please put all the emails the Mayor has sent to BDI Co. and attach them to the item? Thank you.

Mayor Lago: If you'd like, I can respond to that whenever you're ready.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, I think we have capital.

Commissioner Castro: Are you waiting?

Commissioner Fernandez: You said you did not send emails to yourself. There's records.

Mayor Lago: What I said was, and I will respond to you, I said I don't send emails to myself to inflate my email account. It was in jest. Sometimes what happens, and it's very clear, and everybody here who has, obviously, is understandable and educated, what everybody here does is, when I'm in my office at BDI, and I can't read an email because it's on the screen, I send it to myself from my phone so I can print that out in my office and review it, especially long documents and things that I think are pertinent. But at the end of the day, think about this. Imagine walking to an office where you had two positions, and it makes it seem as if you're doing me a favor by dangling the fact that I'm not going to take your position away. You're only hurting the position in an effort to hurt me. I've kept my mouth shut. You attack me. You constantly scream the card of attack, attack, attack. But the only person that's attacking here and has started the attacks just in the last Commission meeting and this Commission is you. So, let's get to business, let's finish up. And I welcome...

(MULTIPLE PARTIES SPEAKING IN UNISON)

Commissioner Fernandez: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: I welcome you, and I welcome...

Commissioner Castro: I have...

(MULTIPLE PARTIES SPEAKING IN UNISON)

Mayor Lago: Let me just finish one last thing. And I welcome you having as much need -- as much needed help as you need. If you need to hire people to assist you in whatever it is, the legislation that you're writing, you know, and stuff like that, I welcome it. I welcome it. I would never want the residents to suffer because you can't do your job. And that's what you're trying to do with me.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: And I'm very curious because I'm pretty sure that if I was sending City emails to my personal business, it would be a huge deal. What is the legality behind sending a City email to your company that is also doing work within the City?

City Attorney Suárez: Sending an email to an email, another email, I don't think there's any -- you know, generally that question, I don't think there's an issue with that.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, let me correct the statement that's made again incorrectly, which will be used by the blogs. I don't have any active permits in the City since the last one which I

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did, which was Graciano's, a restaurant I did over two years ago in the City. I've avoided extensively to do any business with the City, unlike yourself, which has...

Commissioner Castro: You're actually incorrect, sir.

Mayor Lago: Mmany, many, many permits in the City.

Commissioner Castro: You're very -- and let me, let me...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Wait, wait, wait.

Commissioner Castro: Hold on, hold on, let me -- this is...

Vice Mayor Anderson: But wait.

Commissioner Castro: Ding, ding, ding, big news. Let me...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Let's...

Commissioner Castro: Let me inform you, okay? As of several months ago, I have no business in the City, okay? Anything that has to do with Coral Gables is not linked to me, does not belong to me, no name of it.

Mayor Lago: (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Castro: Okay, so stop trying to attack me.

Mayor Lago: Same thing you did to me.

Commissioner Castro: When it comes...

Mayor Lago: You were the first one.

Commissioner Castro: When it comes to...

Mayor Lago: You said I have business in the City; I don't.

Commissioner Castro: When it comes to my business, because you're attacking the livelihood of a single mother, and you continue to do it over and over again through alias names and directly through yourself.

Mayor Lago: I don't. I don't. Listen, I don't...

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Commissioner Castro: You do.

Mayor Lago: And I wish you the best of luck, and it was heartfelt, and I feel terrible about your daughter. I only wish you the best. And if I can help you at all with my contacts in the medical world, my father, myself, even financially, I'm here to support you. But please, at the end of the day, the only person that brought up personal business was you before you brought it up. You brought up my business, and I said I haven't worked for two years in the City.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'm...

Mayor Lago: So, I think we have a lot to talk about. We have another item. Madam City Attorney, I'd like to move on with the item.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'd like to also ask you all to keep in mind, in doing what we need to do that's in the best interest of the City, we have to keep in mind that the number one thing that was reported to the Community Foundation was that the division divide on this Commission is top of mind. That was the first response. So, we have a motion, we took a vote, let's move forward.

Commissioner Fernandez: But it's -- I think there's a bigger problem, it's a bigger underlying problem when the Mayor has spent \$900,000 attacking his colleagues with false information through his PAC. You know, it's easy to say, oh, everybody else is attacking me. The minute we walk out of here today, his PAC will be sending out an email. If you get an email from Coral Gables First today, it's coming from him attacking his colleagues. And it's easy for you to say because he actually painted in his emails like you did not approve the millage rate. In fact, that's the ad that's continuing to run on social media with false information, which by the way, is against the Civility Code. And we haven't brought it up. There has been plenty of opportunities to re-censure this individual, and we haven't done it for the benefit of the City. At least I haven't.

Mayor Lago: So, you know, the interesting thing about it, I'm happy you bring that up, and I'd love to see if my colleagues are willing to support me. I'd like to censure my colleague to the left for talking openly about my medical history and baiting me, talking about whether I should take my pills, not once, but twice on a private matter here in an effort to try to bait me here on the Commission floor. So, I make a motion to censure Ariel Fernandez for him openly violating my personal medical records, not once but twice, here on the Commission floor. Let's see. Let's see if anybody's willing to second that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I don't...

Mayor Lago: So, it's okay for you to do that, but at the minimum, what you could do is apologize to me and to my family for stating things.



Commissioner Fernandez: And what about you?

Mayor Lago: Stating things.

Commissioner Fernandez: When we go to events and you're saying that I am fat and that I don't exercise, this is something you do on a regular basis...

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Which is related to my diabetes, which you know very well about.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: But you know what? It's easy to throw stones...

Mayor Lago: I'm not going to get into it.

Commissioner Fernandez: From that side.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, those are your insecurities.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, it's -- I don't have any insecurities, but you do.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Rojas: If I may...

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll make a motion to approve the capital projects.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Commissioner Castro: Before we move forward...

Mayor Lago: I'll second that.

Commissioner Castro: Before we move forward, according to his -- to the Mayor -- to the speech, 102 percent. And I'm really, really sick and tired of going through social media, and it's every single day over and over, and if you follow him, you would see 102 percent salary raise. Do you know what that number of 102 percent is? What is it?

Mayor Lago: I do. We're moving on.

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City Commission Meeting

September 12, 2024

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Commissioner Castro: No, we're not moving on because I'm...

Mayor Lago: You're not going to cross-examine me on the floor.

Commissioner Castro: Then don't worry.

Mayor Lago: And I'm going to keep posting as much as I need to post it because everybody should realize that you raised your salary and then you have to sit here in front of the employees and state, you know, that you're for the employees, but you raised your salary 102 percent. What you should have done is you should have...

Commissioner Castro: That 102...

Mayor Lago: I would appreciate if you didn't interrupt me, because I don't interrupt you.

Commissioner Castro: (INAUDIBLE) right now.

Mayor Lago: I was answering you. What you should do, what you should do is you should have taken this to a vote to the residents because that's never happened here in the City. And it's not a good look for the City, I mean, to the point that not -- it's just not in the best interest. And I apologize that it bothers you. There's a lot of things, a lot of things that the three of you do in an effort to raise suspicions, to do everything you possibly can in an effort -- and over and over and over. Everything comes out unfounded, everything comes out correct. Because at the end of the day, at the end of the day, my only interest is serving the residents of the City. So, you can take people away from me if you'd like. At the end of the day, but you're only hurting the residents. You're not hurting me. You're only hurting the residents.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, in an effort to move this meeting forward...

Commissioner Castro: No, no, but I'm not even finished talking. I want to put on the record and it's extremely important. 102 signifies we were getting \$38,000. We're getting \$68,000. That's \$30,000 per commissioner, okay, plus the \$8,000. That's a \$38,000 raise. When you say 102 percent salary, that sounds like we're getting paid \$150,000. That sounds like we're getting paid \$100,000. That is not accurate, okay? And you need to really stop being so misleading and trying to put -- I take it personally at this point, okay?

Mayor Lago: So do I.

Commissioner Castro: So, Commissioner Castro...

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Since you want to beat this drum, I'll clarify it for you. The reason I opposed it -- and I still oppose it -- is the way you've done it. You did it without transparency. You hid it in the budget, and you didn't put it in the budget in a manner that it would happen if you got reelected, like most elected leaders do. You knew what this position paid when you accepted it. It would be like the sanitation workers taking a job, you know, for a certain salary and then wanting 101 -- and I did the calculation -- .2 increase. So, in an effort to move this meeting forward and stop going down into the gutter of things that don't matter to the residents or the City or the employees that are sitting here, spending their time here patiently waiting for us to move forward, I'll move to adopt the budget.

Commissioner Fernandez: I already moved -- I already moved it.

City Clerk Urquia: We have a motion.

Commissioner Menendez: But I'm the only one who hasn't had a chance to say anything. So, it's my turn. The two of you have been beating the same drum so much, I swear I think you're Buddy Rich playing the drums because you've used everything and anything you both can to politically try to destroy us. When we voted the first time on the millage rate, what the Mayor's PAC sent out to everybody was that it was a 3-2 vote to raise everybody's taxes. But in fact, it was a 4-1 vote, but the Mayor decided he wanted to protect the Vice Mayor. And quite honestly, we're not raising. The millage rate is the same the way it's been for about 10 years. And if your taxes do go up, it's because the County assessed all our properties at a higher rate. But unfortunately, not everybody has the opportunity to watch the Commission meetings, attend the Commission meetings, and what they base their decisions or their judgment on what we're doing, our job, or even us as people is what certain PACs send out seven days a week, 365 days a year, attacking, attacking the three of us. And there are social media posts out there saying some horrible personal things about not only myself, but my colleagues. That's all PAC related. So, please, I know that only a few people are going to hear this, but you've been bombarded for a year with misinformation with the intention of destroying three people and why? Because some people don't get their way.

Mayor Lago: I know.

Commissioner Menendez: And guess what? They -- you know, somebody says, well, you have a 3-2 vote and the Manager, you work well with the Manager. Well, guess what? There are certain people up here on the dais that had the 3-2 vote for a long time and had a manager with a very good working relationship. You know, you can't start now complaining when there wasn't a complaint all those years prior. So, it's unfortunate, and you know, it's not the Coral Gables I grew up in, but we're in a new age where people find it at liberty to destroy other people's -- look, one thing is policy, but to destroy them as human beings, destroy them, their character, when a lot of us have spent our entire life serving the community, and it's unfortunate. And I understand why people sometimes don't want to run because you have to face and deal with the nonsense that's out to destroy people, and that's not the Coral Gables I grew up in.

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Mayor Lago: So, I want to respond really quick, and I'll be very simple. It sounds beautiful, you know, this theory about PACs and everything like that. But let us not forget, tomorrow morning, we'll all wake up and there will be an article in not one blog but two blogs here pounding me, and saying that I own property in Little Gables, and that I'm a lobbyist, and that my brother's associated with the City, and all the insane things, that I attacked, assaulted the Manager. Obviously, that didn't come to fruition. All the crazy things that these blogs say, you know, all these ridiculous, unfounded statements, but they're happy with those things. But to disseminate the information and appropriate information using a PAC makes them upset. I'm sorry. I have to make sure that the residents are aware of everything that's happening here in the City. They use blogs. I use a PAC that puts out information that is appropriate. At least I don't hide behind it. Gables Insider was owned by Ariel Fernandez. And by the way, and the funny part, as Maria laughs and giggles the entire meeting, all of you used to talk to me about how upset you were about what was being said in the Gables Insider about you and the horrific things that were said about the employees here in the City before he gave it up to Javi Baños. And they say constantly misleading things, and they never retract. You think there was a retraction in regards to the assault on the Manager? You think there was a retraction on the "he owns property in Little Gables?" You think there was a retraction about all the insane things he said about me doing a business transaction with somebody and stealing \$34 million, all that stuff that happened? It wasn't, just like the recall, the recall failed. And that's under investigation because I know people have been called here. So, at the end of the day, please, I don't want to hear the sob story because tomorrow morning there will be two blogs that are paid by these individuals to hit me...

Commissioner Castro: Never.

Mayor Lago: Or by another entity that doesn't want to say anything, like the firefighters who are constantly involved in the effort to try to smear me in one form or another. But at the end of the day, it's okay, we move forward, we move forward. But please, don't come and tell me you're doing me a favor by letting me keep the employees that are serving this community. These employees were there before I even got this position, but I'm honored to serve in this position. So, they were there before, so we move forward...

Commissioner Castro: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: And we can end the meeting.

Commissioner Castro: The information that you're putting out in the PACs, and you're saying that it's true, it's lies. About the inspector general, that we didn't want inspector generals, lies again, and you should be ashamed of yourself and actually embarrassed to put out there that that's the truth. Because they're all lies, and I hate to call you a liar because that's disrespectful, but there's no other word but to call you a liar, okay? And the things that were in the Gables Insider -- and I don't want to get involved because I really don't know much -- but let me just clarify and

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put this on the record. Weren't you paying him to put them on there? And now you're saying he's talking about employees? How do you think he knew about the employees? I'm not cross -- you don't even have to answer. That was already out there.

Mayor Lago: You're misleading again, as always. The benefit of using Gables Insider was to disseminate positive information, not to disseminate destructive information as was done. I would never in my life ever do that. It's nice to conflate the issue because it benefits you, but at the end of the day, that's not the truth. And you know it's not. It's not so...

Commissioner Castro: No, I don't know what the truth is anymore.

Mayor Lago: Moving -- moving -- moving on. Madam City Attorney. Yes, ma'am.

City Attorney Suárez: So, the next item is a resolution of the City Commission adopting the Capital Improvement Program for the five fiscal years from 2025 to 2029.

Commissioner Menendez: I'll move it.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, it was already moved.

Mayor Lago: Yep, it was moved and second. Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Moving on. Item 5.

City Clerk Urquia: That is 5.

Commissioner Fernandez: That was 5.

Mayor Lago: We're done?

City Attorney Suárez: Yeah, that was (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: All right, perfect. Thank you very much. As always to staff, I apologize for the circus. Your efforts are incredibly appreciated. As always, as always, we cannot thank you enough

for your efforts and your continued support of the residents and the business community. God bless all of you. Thank you and have a wonderful evening.

Assistant Finance Director Rodriguez: Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: The ringleader calls it a circus.