

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item K
February 24, 2026
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Melissa Castro

Commissioner Ariel Fernandez

Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item K [Start: 3:07 p.m.]

Discussion Items

Mayor Lago: Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, anything good for the order?

Vice Mayor Anderson: This Saturday is a couple things. One, we have the Farmer's Market. There are some wonderful vendors out there. I hope everybody enjoys it. Crime Watch is going to be out there. They have these reflective bands you can go pick up. I did have a neighbor who likes to walk out in the street. Unfortunately, get hit by a vehicle. These things light up. Avail yourself of that as well. The Dolphin's Cancer Challenge ride is also this Saturday. I will be out there. I urge people to support those who are riding. Make a donation. It's a great cause. And I look forward to our next meeting. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Yeah. I look forward to our next meeting as well. Billy, did you get two videos from my...

City Clerk Urquia: We did receive.

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Commissioner Castro: You got one?

City Clerk Urquia: We received one video, Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Let me, okay. So, the first one is on Saturday, when I'm hearing there's this dolphin thing. Well, that's not what I'm talking about. But okay, we'll put that. This is a dog walk. This is a dog walk. It was very successful. I think there were more than 70 dogs that attended. And I just wanted to show a little bit of all the businesses that were really displayed on Miracle Mile. There were some businesses that, without me contacting them at all, they just came out and started giving testers of their restaurants, like in the food court when you go to a mall, to the people that were walking by. I had a very, very large, large crowd, which I was very happy with. In fact, Bliss was out there, too, putting little bowls of water for the dogs. I'm very thankful to them. Not only that, they gave people like little fans because it was fairly hot. So, I'm very thankful for them. This is not something that was coordinated. But I do encourage other businesses to go ahead if you want to give testers of people taste your food and you can promote. This is a very complimentary way to expose your business. The other thing is, I want to go ahead and remind everyone that on Saturday, there is another, well, there's a community, there you go. There's a community run. So, if you want to come with me and run, I encourage you to live a healthy lifestyle and meet your neighbors. It's this Saturday at 10 in the morning in Fenella Park.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: Yeah, so a couple of things. Just reminding everybody that we have the upcoming Carnival on the Mile, March 7 and 8, I do believe, which is an amazing event. Look forward to that each year. We also have, and I haven't been able to go recently, but I plan on going to the upcoming Gables Gallery Nights, the first Friday of the month. That's a great opportunity. The weather's outstanding to be able to enjoy the City Beautiful outside, and maybe if you're lucky, put on a sweater. The last thing I'd like to just reminisce, or I guess comment on is how outstanding and how encouraging and uplifting it was, the celebration that we had, the recognition of the month of Ramadan. Here in the courtyard at City Hall, it was so well attended. I think all in attendance were pleasantly surprised at how enthusiastic the community was to come out to that event. I thought our Mayor spoke beautifully. I think it was wonderful to have all members of our Commission present for that event. And I definitely learned quite a bit about that particular religious holiday. And that's really keeping in the spirit of the city's ongoing recognition of the other major faiths when it comes to Christmas and as well as Hanukkah. So, kudos to all, in particular, the city staff who did such an amazing job putting together a beautiful, beautiful presentation too.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, I echo your comments. I think the Ramadan event was an incredible community building opportunity and our staff did a phenomenal job. The food was, I didn't get to try it. I heard it was very good.

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Commissioner Lara: Me neither. But I wasn't fasting.

Commissioner Fernandez: I wasn't fasting either, but it was a great opportunity. And it was great to see some members of the community that maybe had some animosity towards actions that we had taken in the past come together and be joyful about what we were doing that day. And it was a great opportunity to come together and really celebrate what Ramadan is all about, which is about building community. Question for the Manager. Next commission meeting, are we at the new location or are we still here? Because I know the Commission is moving tomorrow.

City Manager Iglesias: The March meeting will be at the CMR from now on. The meetings will be at the CMR.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay, so for residents who are going to be coming in, the next meeting will begin at the Public Safety Building in the community meeting room. And the Commission will be moving as of tomorrow. So, if you're going to be meeting with us, check with our staff just to see where we will be during our next meeting.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk, do you have some photos that I wanted to show? On the left side, I don't know, maybe my staff can.

City Clerk Urquia: Give me a second.

Mayor Lago: Well, we'll wait for those. So, I welcome everyone to-

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: These?

Mayor Lago: No, no, not those. Those are just some things. Well, you can put those on. Be nice to show those. So those are some things that we found in the neighborhood this week, in my neighborhood on Saturday that I sent over. As you can tell, those are my text messages with the DCM. Those are on Miller specifically. I'm getting a lot of calls from residents on Miller about how certain homes, just the amount of things that are put outside the houses and the actual lack of the homes being properly maintained. But this weekend, it wasn't about the homes on Miller or just the appearance of these homes. It was about; you had an abandoned boat. And if you can see the date of the text messages, that was on Saturday. On Saturday, I sent that boat to the DCM with the address. Code Enforcement went out there and Code Enforcement fined them. But that boat remained till, I think it was till Tuesday, right? Till today. Yeah, they're still there. You can also see on the top left; you'll see a table that was there. And there was a bunch of other items that later were propped up, but I didn't want to take more pictures and bother the DCM over the weekend. I had bothered him enough with all the stuff that the residents send me and we try to resolve. So,
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this is an example of one of the items that was used in the last election against me. One of the things I want to be very, very clear, I will continue to do this. When the residents call me to address their issues, I won't stop. We say we're residents first. We work 24/7, seven days a week. As a DCM will tell you, this is critically important to maintaining the character of our city. Mr. Clerk, there's also some other pictures.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, I have.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, I'd like to put those up. So, I'm very proud of this. This is a project that I've been working on for a few years. The project is finally done. And I know we don't like to use the word I, but I am very proud of this. I'm very proud of the amount of money that we spent on this, the investment that we made, the fact that staff did a wonderful job, and the fact that this was requested by the community for many, many years. I worked on this with the ACM, the DCM, the Manager, and our staff for years on this project. And I want to thank them for the hard work. And I'm also honored that my colleagues approved my naming of the park to be the David Lawrence Jr. and Family Park. I asked you to come out on Saturday, March 14th. It's a community event. Parking is going to be an issue. So, I asked people, just like you're going to have to park at a friend's house and walk, or maybe we can, the shuttle, there's going to be a shuttle, but some people don't want to take the shuttle. Let's be thoughtful and cognizant of the community. You can maybe park on Ponce, next to the Underline and walk. There's going to be some parking there, but I think it's going to be a lot of overflows. It's going to be a lot of people. David is beloved. So, I want people to get there. Mr. Clerk, anything else I have from you?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes. there's one more. If cable TV could share my screen.

Mayor Lago: All right, so this is from last night. I show you this picture because, these pictures, because we are failing to truly shine a light on what happened 30 years ago today. My father took me 30 years ago to a march after the four brothers to the rescue pilots were shot down by Raul Castro. It's already proven, it's a proven fact by the United States government and international agencies that Raul Castro gave the order to knock down these four Americans, Cuban Americans, who were in the American waters, and they were shot down and killed. Last night was an amazing turnout at the FIU Memorial. I was there with my father and the Tax Collector, Dariel Fernandez, and we also had Representative Rick Scott's representative there. There were many political prisoners there. There were many Plantados that were there, many members of Abdala, El Directorio, Lidney. It was well-represented, the community. There were hundreds of people there last night. And the community came out not only in remembrance and in a candlelit vigil, as you can see on the top, but it also came out in request of what our Congressmen and our Senators are doing, asking for Raul Castro to be indicted. But I also wanted to mention something that's just as important as the indictment and also remembering these four individuals that were lost is I want to give thanks to President Trump and to our Secretary of State, Marco Rubio. They have been

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leading in our hemisphere like they've never been led before. When you look at issues like Venezuela, when you look at issues like Cuba, you look at issues like Venezuela, Chile, Nicaragua, and I know that I'm forgetting countries, Argentina, we've seen a real change in our hemisphere. We've seen a change for democracy, for human rights, and it has taken real tough leadership. Whether you're on the left or the right, it doesn't matter. We're all for democracy, and we're all for human rights, and we're all for free speech, and we have to give credit where credit is due. And as a proud member of St. Augustine Catholic Church, it's always an honor to see the Secretary of State there. He's one of us in this community, and it doesn't matter whether you're a Democrat, or you're a Republican, or an Independent, it doesn't matter, he's one of us. He's a guy who came from West Miami, and he's trying to do the best job he possibly can to ensure our way of life, especially in this hemisphere. So, I want to congratulate the Secretary of State for his efforts. And I hope that people get involved, because today is 30 years since those planes were knocked down. So, if you get a chance to learn a little bit about Brothers to the Rescue, it could have happened to anybody. One of my family members, very close friends, a lady was one of the pilots for Brothers to the Rescue. Thank God that she was spared, she was not shot down that day. But she did many, many missions, trips in search of Cubans that were in the middle of the ocean, searching freedom, in hopes of freedom. So, it's a terrible, terrible situation that those families have had to live through over the last 30 years, and I hope that an indictment of Raul Castro will bring some comfort and peace. It'll never truly make them whole, and you can never expect that, the loss of a son. But hopefully this moment will bring some peace and tranquility to those families, so God bless them. Mr. Clerk, anything else that I have there, anything else?

City Clerk Urquia: I don't have anything else.

Mayor Lago: All right, well, I mentioned these few things, and I welcome everyone to please join me. I'll be having a Town Hall on March 9th, as I do every year, twice a year, at 5.30 in the Public Safety Building. The Supervisor of Elections will be there, Alina Garcia. She will present the ballot process, and the City Attorney will answer any questions on the ballots. Then we'll open it up to have a discussion on the referendums or anything that deals with the city. It'll probably be about a 30-minute presentation in between the City Attorney and our Alina Garcia, who we're blessed to have her. She's also done some videos on behalf of our office to educate individuals to come out and vote in the April referendum's election. And then we'll open up to have a conversation on all the issues that are pertinent to the city. One of the Commissioners has already mentioned it, but I'm very proud to say that this is our last Commission meeting here, for the next few years. There was a challenge that was made to get this building in order. It's 100 years old, and we're going to meet that challenge. We're going to deal with it head-on, and I'm proud to say that I never left this building. I never left this building; I never left my office. I've held office hours every Friday. I've met with residents; my team has been here. We never left this office. No matter when the comments were made that this building was falling, this building was never falling, as our DCM so eloquently stated on the Commission floor. We're here, and now we leave to bring this old, beautiful building

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back to its original splendor, its original glory. Challenge made, challenge accepted. And we will get it done, because we have the best team to deliver on it. So, I want to congratulate the Manager, the DCM, the ACM, Public Works, all the directors, all our staff. This is a lift that's made possible through your hard work, and this is a monumental moment in our city. And I want to congratulate you. We may never be back again, truly, at the end of the day, in reference to, I may never be back here, but I think it's the right thing to do for future generations to make sure that we protect this amazing, amazing building. By the way, I'll be moving my office hours this Friday, February 27th, and the new address is 234 Minorca Avenue. I want to commend the Manager, the DCM, the ACM, the entire team, I met with him, Raimundo, the Public Works Department, the city architects, everyone that had a hand in it. The office is looking incredible. You did a wonderful job. I think the residents are going to be very happy with the new offices. So, I commend you for your hard work. Seamless transition on this project. I'll be out of my office probably in the next few days, and I'll be 234 Minorca for office hours on Friday. So, thank you for that. Well done, seamless. No one skipped a beat. Two last things. I want to mention that today's Stephanie's birthday. Happy birthday, Stephanie. I don't know where she's at. She's around here somewhere. An amazing City Attorney that we're blessed to have here. Today's her birthday, so wish her a happy birthday when you see her. And in closing, we are in the middle of Lent. It's a beautiful moment for us Catholics. It's a moment for repentance. It's a moment to think about who we are as Catholics, who we are as humans, who we are as members of this community. I want to wish all of my Catholic members, along with my Ramadan members of this community, a beautiful season. This is a moment to enjoy yourselves. Enjoy yourselves, bask, and understand why we're here and why we're blessed to live in this wonderful country and to live in this wonderful community. And this is a moment for community and to truly be amongst the family and friends. So, God bless all of you and thank you for allowing me the honor to serve you. And I look forward to our next meeting, not at City Hall, but at the Public Safety Building. Yes, Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I just wanted to thank you for going out to FIU and supporting the city in that event. And I had the honor to represent one of the victims of terrorism. And I just want to remind people that it's not just the brave pilots that got shut down, but also the fact that Raul Castro and Castro regime had placed in our midst people that infiltrated Brothers to the Rescue, married an individual that was a member of our community who didn't know that they were dealing with a Cuban regime informant. And that person is back in Cuba as a hero. And that Cuba is, and as long as the current regime is in place, always be a state sponsor of terrorism, right at our doorstep. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: And I'm happy you mentioned that because you never, you've talked about a privacy, but one thing I would love for people to really get a better understanding of the case and the battle that you won in the courts, which is a legendary battle, but not only for Cubans, but for Americans, for people who live and fight for freedom, for human rights, for a free Cuba, to ensure our way of life here, our constitution. So that case that you were involved in is one too. They're two for the

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ages. They're two for the ages. So, I want to commend you. And one of the things that besides, and I'm happy something came to mind that I touched upon it before. I got to meet some of the most impressive individuals, both men and women yesterday, who I've met many of them before. I've had Dr. Bisset, who was over 15 years in prison in my house, in my parents' house on multiple occasions. He's still in Cuba. I've met Daniel Ferrer yesterday, which I've had conversations with him on the phone, but I've never had the pleasure and honor of meeting him. He's a good friend of my father's. My father's been supporting him for a long time. Yesterday, I got to meet a lot of members of Los Plantados. If you haven't heard about Los Plantados, I've met a few of them, but these are resilient individuals. People who, when you talk to them, there's a smile on their face. And some of them were tortured, mistreated for years and years and years. And when you talk about them, they talk about this country, about America. They talk about freedom. They talk about the love. They have a love affair with what the United States of America is. And I sat there and I listened to them for a little while before the event commenced. And it really puts things into perspective. Like really puts things into perspective. And the Manager and my father, and my father came to visit on office hours on Friday. And it was just coincided that you were there speaking to me about an issue at the end of the day. And it was beautiful for you, and not many people know this, but for the Manager to tell his family story along with my father and share that my grandfather was a political prisoner, all the things that have happened in your family's life in regard to them being political prisoners. And that story is, the story is who we are, and it's in our makeup, it's in our bones, and it's in our DNA. And at the end of the day, we see it so close. But as Americans, we want that freedom for my grandparents that are long gone. I want my parents to be able to see something as beautiful as that. So again, it's a privilege to represent the city. And I want to thank you for allowing me the privilege. And I look forward to seeing all of you at the Public Safety Building. Thank you, and God bless. Thank you very much.