

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C - Public Comments
February 9, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Javier Banos
Jackson Rip Holmes
Leon Kelner
Sue Kawalerski
Patricia San Pedro
Mayra Joli

Agenda Item C – Public Comments [Start: 4:15 p.m.]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Public Comments, Mr. City Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, we do have a couple members of the public who have requested to speak. Before we move to public comments, Madam City Attorney, I believe there is special instructions as to those who want to speak during the Craft Section.

City Attorney Ramos: Thank you Mr. Clerk. If you are intending on speaking on F-3 or F-4, they are quasi-judicial items, and so, pursuant to the City Code you must testify on those items during
City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021

the actual item. However, if you'd like to speak more generally about either F-1, which is legislative, although F-2 related to the Craft Section, which is also legislative, or F-5 or F-6, or any other item on the agenda, you certainly can do so during this time, just not on F-3 or F-4, you just need to be sworn in for those at the time the public hearing starts.

City Clerk Urquia: The first speaker will be Mr. Javier Banos.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Banos you have three minutes.

Mr. Banos: Good morning Mr. Mayor and members of the City Commission and to all the members of the public who are listening. I will speak more directly to each one of the items, the F items when that comes in. But I do want to bring attention to the Commission to the many residents who today showed up at noon in front of City Hall to preserve their quality of life and to prevent a concrete canyon from being erected around Miracle Mile. I think you have a swell of city activists and many members of the public who are here present, as well as many members who are physically present outside, socially distanced in a way that was safe to everyone, and we thank the City of Coral Gables Police protected us while they were there.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Banos, you are aware that this item is coming up at 5, right?

Mr. Banos: I am not asking you on any other item, sir, I'm just speaking directly as to what happened outside the City Hall today.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

Mr. Banos: And we are asking you to please listen to their concerns and their questions and to actually, for once, pay attention to them rather than to the many developers. There are many Commissioners and members of the Commission up there who are very diligent, who pay attention to their voters. Sometimes the impression has been created, especially by one member who has told them that they are there for one particular agenda. I think it's not the moment for that, it's a moment to listen and a moment to explain, so that misunderstandings don't happen and we actually have an opportunity for everybody to be heard, an opportunity to stop what everyone fears will be the end or significant modification of the quality of life and it's my hope that you listen to what happened today outside, and to everyone who speaks today, and we stop this action from taking place. Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Mr. Banos, this is Commissioner Mena, I just wanted to make sure I heard you correctly. Was your suggestion that we listen to the residents on an issue for once, is that what you said?

*City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021*

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's what he said, yes.

Mr. Banos: Commissioner Mena, again, it was a general comment, and this pertains, I don't think I was addressing you directly. There was one comment made by one member of the Commission a few years ago, and then that person left the Commission, in which they said specifically that they did not agree what was said. Perhaps my comments were misaddressed to all the Commission in general and maybe I should have addressed it to that particular member and made to you directly.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mr. Banos. I will address your comments later on when the item comes up, as it should be. Mr. City Clerk.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Ms. Anderson the floor is yours.

Ms. Anderson: Based upon the City Attorney's comments about the items and needing to be sworn in, I will pass until that time and ask to speak then.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you Ms. Anderson.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker will be Mr. Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Holmes.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Holmes you need to unmute yourself.

Mr. Holmes: Can you hear me now?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mr. Holmes: Okay. So, I'll take the same road as Rhonda Anderson. I don't want to limit myself ability to comment on the substantive items, so I'll pass until that juncture. I will add though that it is my hope that everyone at City Hall was able to notice the rally. I thought it was large by Coral Gables standards and God willing, we got some media coverage. I would love to hear from any of you on the City Commission know of any larger gatherings by citizens at City Hall over the years, all the way back, as far as you want to go. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: And lastly, I have a phone number, who has their hand raised, Mr. Mayor, so they are going to have to identify themselves once they are allowed to speak.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Remember, the zoning issues are going to come up at 5 o'clock, 5 o'clock, please. Anybody else, Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, one more person.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: One more person. Who is it?

City Clerk Urquia: It's a phone number, I'm not able to see a name of who the person is, so they need to identify themselves.

Karelia Carbonell: Hello? Hi, I think it's me, but this is Karelia, but I apologize, I thought it was on F-1. I thought we were dealing with the items.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Identify yourself.

Karelia Martinez-Carbonell: Karelia Martinez-Carbonell.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

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

Karelia Martinez-Carbonell: I'll pass.

[Note for the Record: Public Comments resumed]

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor before you continue, I have additional residents who wanted to make comments during the public comments they were not able to.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: How many? I think their time has passed.

City Clerk Urquia: Right now, there is three.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: What?

City Clerk Urquia: Three.

*City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021*

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay.

City Clerk Urquia: The first person is going to be Mr. Leon Kelner. Mr. Kelner, please unmute yourself.

Mr. Kelner: Thank you Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. I had to think long and hard about what I wanted to say this evening in my three minutes. I'm not going to urge you to vote one way or the other on the zoning amendments. After three years, you know how you plan to vote. I want to talk to you and the residents about the utter disdain that city government have shown the residents over the past few months. Ramon Trias misrepresented this project from the outset using terms such as modernize, updating, and streamlining.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Kelner this is coming up at 5 o'clock, do you realize that? This is coming up at 5 o'clock.

Mr. Kelner: Please Mr. Mayor, this has absolutely nothing to do with the vote. This has to do with how I view the Commission and the city government acting, not about the votes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Kelner: Thank you. Ramon Trias misrepresented this project from the outset, using terms such as modernize, updating and streamlining. Never disclosing the wholesale of rewrite that we were presented with. Trias buried public notice of the so-called 28 meetings; 6 clicks deep in the Coral Gables website, so only developers and attorneys knew what was going on. When we inquired, we were stone-walled. I e-mailed the City Manager multiple times for a meeting or a phone call. He never responded. Ramon Trias promised to provide explanations to the civic groups. He never did. The so-called town meetings that were scheduled after numerous complaints were designed to limit public input – zone made that easy. There was no dialogue. At the first meeting, the Mayor issued a stinging rebuke of the residents demanding input and then he stormed out without hearing any of the residents. The remaining Commissioners sat mute. No one, no one, objected to the Mayor's infantile behavior.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mr. Kelner.

Mr. Kelner: I'm not done. Commissioner Keon mislead me about the scope of the amendments by continuing the lie that nothing was going to change on Miracle Mile, and we know, we know that's not true. This is the same person who wants our vote for Mayor. Commissioner Fors and Mena won't return my e-mails because according to Commissioner Lago, I don't treat them with respect. Commissioners, respect is not given, it is earned. Commissioner Lago was the only one who

*City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021*

engaged. When Trias and Iglesias stonewalled, he fixed it. When the notice of town meetings was hidden, he fixed that. For that I thank him. We don't want a vote. I won't get into it. I can only speculate why...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Kelner...

Mr. Kelner: I'm not done. I am not done, and this is a First Amendment Right, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You are done. Let's go to the next one, Mr. Urquia.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker is going to Ms. Sue Kawalerski.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Ms. Kawalerski.

Ms. Kawalerski: I believe I'm unmuted.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, you are.

Ms. Kawalerski: And Leon, I apologize for the abuse that you are taking. You are a true resident and a patriot. Thank you. This is addressed to the Commission. I want to put in the record a letter that was co-signed by the Coral Gables Neighbors Association, the Gables Good Government Committee, the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables and the Ponce Neighbors Association. "Dear Mayor Valdes-Fauli, Vice Mayor Lago, Commissioners Fors, Keon and Mena. On behalf of the member of the undersigned civic organizations, we wish to voice our opposition to the proposals which the Commission is currently considering for amending the city's zoning code and land use code. We petition you to delay voting on adopting any zoning code or land use map amendments until after the upcoming April Election or more appropriately until after a post pandemic normalcy returns, which would then give the community a meaningful opportunity to fully participate in and contribute to the deliberative process. Why? – because the process used to formulate the proposed amendments to the zoning code was flawed, because it did not formally provide for adequate or meaningful input for residents during the formulation process. After three years of working without an affectively structured methodology for resident inclusion in the deliberative process, the proposal was presented as a fait accompli to the surprise of your constituents, many of whom are members of the undersigned Coral Gables civic organizations. Thus far, so called community meetings have not allowed for adequate input or affective interaction between the Commission and its constituents due in part to the very nature of Zoom gatherings. What is further disconcerting is that city staff, the outside consultants, and members of the Commission have failed to provide adequate responses to written requests for information and/or clarification from residents and from the undersigned civic organizations. In summary,

*City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021*

there should be no vote to adopt the pending proposals until the city’s residents have had an opportunity to hear an open debate on this issue between the candidates for Mayor and Commission members during the upcoming election. Once the new Commission is seated it will hopefully do what should have been done previously and that is to provide a welcoming environment for citizens to participate in the deliberative process effectively and fully.” Thank you for allowing me to enter this into the record.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Kawalerski. I wanted to bring something up, however. You say that there has not been an opportunity to be heard – 68 people have spoken in the last five public meetings in this, and this is the fourth time you speak, Ms. Kawalerski, this is the fourth time you speak, and speaking four times in five meetings if that’s not an opportunity to be heard, I would like to know what is. 68 people participated in the last three meetings, which were held at 5 p.m. and maybe it should have been 136 and not 68, but 68 did speak and several of you spoke several times, including you, Ms. Kawalerski, four times. Next person.

City Clerk Urquia: Next person Mr. Mayor is Ms. Patricia San Pedro.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And that’s the last one? Ms. San Pedro.

Ms. San Pedro: Hello, good afternoon everyone, and thank you Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. I apologize, because I know this issue is at 5 o’clock, but I am unable to be here at five, so I have a very brief statement. I’ve been a resident of Coral Gables for almost 30 years. I also work in Coral Gables at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami. None of my neighbors or friends that live in Coral Gables, and I have many of them, none of them want to see even more tall buildings more than we already have with more density and more traffic. Its going to completely alter the character of what we call our “City Beautiful.” We love our clean city and sadly its just looking more and more like Brickell. There is a reason I live here, and my friends live here and its not to live amidst the concrete jungle. I’ve seen it happen, unfortunately in cities across the country and I don’t consider it progress. I sadly see it as a travesty. I urge you to please delay this vote until we can return to more normal times. Thank you for the opportunity.

City Clerk Urquia: And lastly Mr. Mayor, the last speaker during public comments is going to be Ms. Mayra Joli.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Who?

City Clerk Urquia: Mayra Joli.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This is not the 5 o’clock meeting.
City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021

Ms. Joli: It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter Valdes-Fauli, it doesn't matter, because we are not taking turns to the final turf. He keeps saying there is no time, when is our time? You already told Mr. Leon that he had an opportunity, you said you told Susan she should shut up, because she has had many opportunities to talk.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I'm sorry, you are asking me to shut up?

Ms. Joli: Listen, listen, listen, any of you, listen, any of you are respecting us, any of you know who you owe loyalty to? Any of you were at the balcony looking at the people of Coral Gables, the residents of Coral Gables just chastising your actions. When Black Lives Matter was in the corner doing many things in our city, all of you were at the balcony just opening your arms for them. When are you going to put the residents first? When are you going to put the residents first? Mr. Leon should be able to speak what he wanted. It is not a matter of you having clocks on us. We should have clocks on you and last night we put clocks on you. I think that you let us talk, because you work for us. Enough of this. Everybody...you guys are making this harder for yourselves. You, Mr. Valdes-Fauli, you are on the way out, you are Mayor for a couple of months now. You should set the precedent. This meeting is not to wait until you guys are going to vote for us to be quiet. This meeting should be the whole time just to listen to all of us, all 55,000 of us, even if we don't want to speak. We don't want you to be selling out our city like if it was a piece of cake, that's what you're doing. Yes, all of you. I haven't apologized to any of you, because that's why you are doing it, because the people of Coral Gables are too polite, that's why they have representatives like all of you. Which one of you are going to stand up and say, enough is enough, the people of Coral Gables don't want to talk about it, period. Everybody go home and nobody is going to speak about this anymore, because we don't want it, that's it. And now I have very important things to do than to be listening to all of you just....and all that while we are here just suffering under the sun waiting to see where you are going to be, not listening to us. We are the bosses; you have to obey what we say. Goodbye.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. You should have your blood pressure checked. No more?

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

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Then we'll go on with the Consent Agenda please.

Commissioner Fors: Mr. Mayor, I'd like to make a motion to give Mr. Kelner to conclude. I'd like to make a motion to give Mr. Kelner a minute to conclude.

Vice Mayor Lago: I would second that motion.

*City Commission Meeting
February 9, 2021*

Commissioner Keon: They are asking to let Mr. Kelner just conclude his remarks.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No. He had three minutes and those are the rules and...no we are not going to let him finish. He can speak at 5 though. He can come out at 5 and Consent Agenda please.