

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-3
May 9, 2023
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 Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Development Services Director, Suramy Cabrera
Finance Director, Diana Gomez
Human Resources Director, Raquel Elejabarrieta**

Public Speaker(s)

**Maria Cruz
Sue Kawalerski
Chip Withers
Debra Register
Jackson “Rip” Holmes
Alicia Fernandez
Aurelio Durana
Lauren Dowlen
Raul Valdes-Fauli
Joseph Martucci
Brett Gillis
Unidentified Speaker (for Willy Bermello)
David Winker
Lourdes Wongden**

City Commission Meeting
May 9, 2023
Agenda Item G-3 - Discussion regarding the termination of the City Manager.

Karelia Carbonell
Ed Santamaria
Christopher Challenger

Agenda Item G-3 [11:41 a.m.]

Discussion regarding the termination of the City Manager.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Are we back?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir, we are.

Mayor Lago: I'd like for everyone to please take your seats, and let's close the door. Now we move on to Item G-3, which is time certain for 11 a.m. Commissioner Fernandez, this is your item.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Actually, I would like to open up for public comment first so that we can have a discussion after we've heard from the residents who are here to speak on this item.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Maria Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I must say, I feel so good. I miss Michael Mena because he would have complained about me already. I'm missing that. It's very interesting to see so many people that never come here, show up when something bothers them. Some of us come all the time. Some of us try to tell the elected officials how we feel, good and bad, all the time. Some people only come when they get phone calls saying you better get there and do something because the ship is hitting bad waters. Okay, like I said in the public comments, elections have consequences. And you know what? People that would like to take this City back to the way it's been, people that took the time to support people that did not have the vision of the residents, in other words, people that would like the City to do what they've done well, which is support developers and be nice to lobbyists, et cetera, et cetera, will support today. But that's okay. We're still around, we're not going away. And this may come as a surprise to some of you. Some of the comments that were made, I -- since I had what I call friendship with then Commissioner Lago and now Mayor Lago, I can tell you I was insulted when Mr. Iglesias got credit for the pension and the reserves because I remember sitting here, Vince Lago fighting for that and convincing the Commissioners that we needed to do that. So, hello, you know what? Come on, be truthful, tell the truth. You don't have to lie in order to build somebody up. I wanted to tell you as a resident and like Roxy Bolton used to say, if you stick around long enough, you can see the faults. And I've been here long enough to tell you that one of my big, big issues with Peter Iglesias is that you never get a straight answer. First of all, you never get written answers because you know you don't put in writing what you don't want people to be able to repeat. But second of all, you give answers that could be this way or that way. And I have something vividly in my mind. I came in to talk to Mr. Iglesias about the, I guess they call them peninsulas on Miller Road. We used to have ficus trees by the road. When they changed the ficus trees to oaks, they moved the trees in. So, we had these peninsulas sticking out, concrete, a little grass, people used to park on top of them. And I came in and said, you know, we could use more handicapped parking. Why don't we make -- take them off, make them handicap parking? Oh, Maria, you have no idea. We have this plan to embellish Miller Road. I went home happy. Oh, my God, Miller Road is going to be nice. Well, I called everybody who should have known, and the answer was,

I've never heard that. Well, nobody told me that. I said, well, would you call and contact the City Manager and see when this is going to happen?

Unidentified Speaker: Do other people get extended time too?

Ms. Cruz: They did before.

Mayor Lago: Well, I'm trying -- what I'm trying to...

Ms. Cruz: They did before.

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may.

Ms. Cruz: Other people got...

Mayor Lago: If I may.

Ms. Cruz: Extended time.

Mayor Lago: If I may, Ms. Cruz. We're trying -- if I may, just one second.

Ms. Cruz: Of course.

Mayor Lago: Stop the clock, Mr. Cruz ...

Ms. Cruz: Of course.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk. If I may, I would to, at one point, be able to try to uphold the three minutes. That's what I would like to do. I know we started off on the wrong foot.

Ms. Cruz: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Like we haven't stopped with the clapping. But what I would like to do is, if we could -- you've already talked for four minutes almost -- can we just bring it in for a landing, maybe at five? I think it's appropriate...

Ms. Cruz: Well...

Mayor Lago: For this conversation. Because if not, we will never leave here today. We have a very long agenda, and I know we have things that we want to talk about, but let's be cordial for people who are also waiting. So, let's try to...

Commissioner Fernandez: And I'll...

Mayor Lago: Bring it in for a landing.

Commissioner Fernandez: I would normally agree, and Dr. Gomez was given as much time as he wanted to take, and he took almost eight minutes.

Ms. Cruz: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think everybody should have the same opportunity, and he was speaking on this topic. So, I think if we have residents in the room who wish to speak -- Mayor Valdes-Fauli's here to speak on this issue as well -- they should all be given...

Mayor Lago: What I'm going to -- I'm going to try to find a little bit of common ground. If people who are speaking in favor of the Manager, please try to keep it as short as possible, please. That's

what I'm asking you to do. If they want to speak for as long as they want to talk, we're going to let them set the example moving forward, okay? Go ahead, take your eight minutes.

Ms. Cruz: All right, so the bottom line was there was no plan. Eventually, there was a plan. Eventually, we got what I was promised was being planned, but it was not planned at that point. Okay, and the people that I talked to know who, because as much as people resent the fact that I talk, nobody has ever said here that I do not tell the truth. Because you know what, if I was not telling the truth, somebody would say, oh, that's not the truth. No, okay? All right, so we have a City Manager that most people would say is a very nice person. Very nice person. I have friends that went to school with him. Excellent engineer, but you know what? You can be a nice person, an excellent engineer, a faith-filled person, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and not be a good city manager, okay? And what the residents are saying, and what I think the newly elected heard, was that we need to have a new direction for this city. We need to stop the executive benefits. I know that that's a sore point because, you know, if we don't give them more money, they'll leave. I'm still waiting for the long list of people that when Ariel was elected were going to quit. I haven't seen it yet, so that might not have been the truth, okay. We had a gentleman here that talked about how accessible Peter is. That's not what you heard, I'm sure, because that's not what I hear when people call me. There's always a reason you have to talk to this one, that one, the other one before you can get to him. And Roxy Bolton was the expert on that, okay. We talked -- I know that we're going to bring back again to talk about the police building, the old police building, but as far as I'm concerned, we sold it for pennies, for the value of the land. And then guess what? It's been built. And the person who got it for the value of the land flipped it and now he's building, and not only is he getting a better deal, but he's getting one of our streets, one of the lanes -- the traffic lanes, so he can build what he got at a good price. Okay, last night, perfect example, last night, everybody in the city knows that the Mobility Hub is an issue, and we've been talking about it for a long time. Yet, last night, you had a crowd of people there, and when the mobility issue -- Mobility Hub issue came up, Mr. Manager did not have answers. He didn't know how much had been paid in design. He didn't know who had designed it, why there was only one design, and then he came up with the answer. The answer is the architect decided what the design should be.

Not the people, not the Commissioners, the architect decided. I'm sorry, if the City Manager has to ask the designer to tell us what we want, something is wrong, okay. I could give you -- oh, I told you already -- okay, I could give you a whole bunch of examples. We, this city, needs a new direction. We're asking for it. I know some people that spent big money to support other candidates lost. They lost; they did not win. And you two are here to say what the people told you to do. And I'm hoping that the ones that were not running but were running two years understand what the people want. Because you know what? This is not going to continue the way it is. And there are ways to get rid of people that do not do what they need to do. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Sue Kawalerski.

Ms. Cruz: Excuse me, Mr. Mayor, I'm not going to continue. Every time I go by her, she calls me (INAUDIBLE). If she cannot refrain from that...

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Sue Kawalerski: Good morning, everybody. My name is Sue Kawalerski and I live at 6830 Gratian Street. And this morning I'm representing the Coral Gables Neighbors Association, which many people say got our newly elected Commissioners over the finish line. Thank you, Coral Gables Neighbors Association members for doing this. This is about the City Manager. The election was about the establishment. The voters said we don't want the establishment in there anymore, and we know who the establishment is. Some of them are no longer here. Thank God for Melissa Castro and Ariel Fernandez, who had the courage to stand up to the establishment and run a clean, fantastic campaign. We are a hundred percent behind you. But some of the establishment is here in the audience. They won't go away. Even though they've been in power once, they can't give it up. And so, you're going to hear from them this morning. But I'm here to represent the residents, and the residents said no more of the old way. We want the new way. The new way is about residents and for the residents. Representation for the residents, and we expect that of every Commissioner and the Mayor who is up here right now. Unfortunately, our current

City Manager is part of the establishment. How do we know that? We know that because against the will of the residents who spoke out via petitions, via emails, texts, and in-person confrontations, the will of the people said we do not want that thing called the Mobility Hub as it's designed and at the scale it was designed for. And yet we were totally ignored. This was supposed to be -- and I believe, Peter, you once said, this is going to be my legacy on my way out the door. Well, maybe the way out the door is coming sooner than you expected because the legacy is your Achilles heel. That was the final nail in the coffin for most residents regarding this City Administration. Dr. Sokoloff earlier also talked about the maintenance. We can't even maintain what we have. If you look around this City Hall, one of the Commissioners told me she can't open up the window. There's tape on the window in City Hall. You enter this building -- if I was a visitor from another country and I came here, I would think this would be a third world country city hall, not Coral Gables. We can't maintain what we have, and maintenance is under the purview of the head, the City Manager. If we can't maintain what we have, what's wrong? We don't have money to maintain what we have, yet we're pushing projects even the residents don't want. So, I'm here on behalf of the Coral Gables Neighbors Association saying it's time to go. Sorry, Mr. Iglesias.

City Clerk Urquia: Chip Withers.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Withers, thank you for being here.

Chip Withers: Chip Withers, 1104 Hardee Road, Coral Gables. Lived there for several years. And thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. Melissa, Ariel, congratulations. City Attorney, City Clerk, City Manager, thank you for this opportunity. And under the watchful eyes of Dr. Eickelberg (phonetic), it brings back a lot of memories. Yes, I will admit I was part of the establishment, and I was proud to be part of this establishment. I think past 25, 30 years that I've served this City either as a Commissioner or as a committee member, I think the City has been moving in the right direction. I really don't have anything planned to speak today, Mr. Mayor, but I will try to be as brief as possible. I did want to reflect on how I know Peter because I think that's very important that you understand how we came to know each other. Many of you know that you

are the last stop for many residents to complain, whether it's about a barking dog at three o'clock in the afternoon or music from the neighbors at ten, or Burger Bob's, or the park, or whatever. Ariel, you'll find out. Melissa, you'll find out that those calls come seven days a week. They'll come when you're standing in the line at Publix supermarket, and it's like you are the last stop for many of these residents. And I happened to be the last stop for three very powerful, influential individuals that put a lot of money and effort into this City when I was on the City Commission. And my first call that I made when I got these calls was to our City Manager for permission to talk to, Peter Iglesias, who was then the -- I don't know what the title was. You were head building engineer or structural engineer.

City Manager Iglesias: Construction engineer.

Mr. Withers: Construction, okay. And I can tell you that he was extremely difficult to talk to. I can tell you that he was a real pain in the you know what. I can tell you that he was extremely opinionated. I can tell you that he was very polite, but I had very little influence on his decision. But I can also tell you, I don't know how many thousands of lives he could have possibly saved, or how many millions of dollars in lawsuits he could have saved the City of Coral Gables, there's no telling. And I want to run through those three projects with you real quickly and to tell you my involvement with Peter, if you don't mind. Allen Morris, we all know. We love the building. I think it's probably one of the most phenomenal buildings in Coral Gables, if not the most phenomenal buildings in Coral Gables. When that building was on the Planning Board, Peter stopped it. I don't remember exactly, but it had something to do with wind shear, and the walls weren't properly designed, you know, something like that. I got the call. Peter goes, I can't approve this. I'll hurry up. Peter says...

Mayor Lago: Keep going.

Mr. Withers: I can't approve this. Allen says, we got to get going. And Peter goes, no, this has to be built according to standard because it's not going to withstand a windstorm. I walked out of

the office, kind of a Peter fan, you know, somewhat impressed that he would not be swayed and take on -- a good guy, Allen Morris. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't an adversarial role at all. It was a pretty much understanding role. Then I get a call one day from Jerry Smalley, who was head of the Rouse Company, and Raul knows Jerry Smalley real well because Raul was very instrumental in bringing their shops to Merrick Park, to Coral Gables. And Jerry Smalley goes, I've been red-tagged. It's costing me millions of dollars. The City of Coral Gables red-tagged it. Called the City Manager; oh, Peter, red-tagged it. Red-tagged Merrick, why? He goes, well, the welds that held the steel together to build the structure were faulty. Peter shot it down. They made them redo the welds in that building. So, I walked out of that meeting, and still, a little bit more of a fan of Peter. The third call I got was from David Lieberman of the University of Miami. This was during a time the City of Coral Gables -- if you think we were building a lot now, back in that timeframe, there were I don't know how many millions of square feet was being proposed and on the drawing board. Dave Lieberman said, I can't believe what just happened. They just red-tagged the Convocation Center at the University of Miami. I go, what? Yeah, Peter Iglesias again. I'm going, ah. You know, the third time, I'm going, Peter, this is the third time. And we kind of joked about it. He said, well, let me tell you what happened, because there's a 400 to 500-foot span on top of this Miami arena, I think. And the weld -- and the bolts that were used were Chinese and they were defective. If I let this building proceed with Chinese bolts, there could be a collapse there. So, after those three meetings, I totally understood that this individual cares deeply for the City of Coral Gables, cares deeply for the residents of Coral Gables, and has Coral Gables' back. And you know, looking back -- and I'll wrap it up now, Mr. Mayor -- I think about the past 20 years that I've served on the Commission, and three different city managers, probably 10 to 12 different city commissioner groups that we had up there. I have very little regret over any specific item or issue that, you know, there were a few things we did not get accomplished that I would have really liked to seen done, but a lot of good things were done. But I can stand here before you and tell you that one regret that I do have is that I never have the opportunity to serve as a Commissioner with this man as a City Manager. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you very much.

City Clerk Urquia: Debra Register.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Register, good morning, almost good afternoon. I heard the bells.

Debra Register: My name is -- my name is Debra Register. I live at 1240 Placetas Avenue. And welcome, Melissa.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Ms. Register: Welcome, Ariel. And thank you for letting me speak. As I sit here, I wasn't going to speak on this issue, but when I heard the first part of this meeting, it infuriated me. We have -- we're complaining about being over budget. Over budget for the garage, over budget for the Burger Bob's, over budget for this, over budget for that. Who's responsible? It always goes to the top. That's our City Manager. He's been here long enough. He wasn't -- he was, you know, our engineer a long time ago. Why have things continued to not be cared for? He knew that the country club was in bad condition. It should have been taken care of and not cost as much. So, if he's not looking after all of the departments -- because it's his responsibility, and Mayor, please don't look down, okay, and rub your eyes -- whose responsibility is it? We gave raises and the Commission didn't know. We've negotiated two years apparently on contracts for some of our most important employees that protect us every day, and we're losing them to other cities and the County. So, it's the City Manager's job to get that done and to advise the Commissioner. So, please, who is responsible for all these issues that you're talking about? Thank you and please consider a change.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Holmes.

Mayor Lago: Sir, good afternoon.

Jackson “Rip” Holmes: I support the retention of Peter Iglesias as city manager. And I can’t help but comment on the irony. The reason I do is because of Mr. Fernandez’s failure to bring experts to the table on my survival need for parking. Last Wednesday, I sent out a blast email, that is to 50 recipients, saying that the people who are against the Mobility Hub have their opinions, which they certainly voice with alarming excess or something, whatever it is, but they don’t have experts. Mr. Fernandez has admitted he has no real expertise with parking, retail. Where are the experts? So, I now find myself telling our City Manager, Peter Iglesias, in the last break, I said, my survival as a retail property owner depends -- if there’s no parking, there’s no income, and I go under, and I go bankrupt. I said it last night, under penalties for perjury, I say it again today, under penalties for perjury. Does anybody care? Obviously not the CGNA, obviously not Mr. Fernandez, and I have to care, right? I have a family. I have a daughter. She’s going to inherit my property. Is it going to be worth anything, or am I going to be bankrupt by then? My survival depends on Peter Iglesias’ survival so that we get the parking and don’t kill Miracle Mile by depriving it of parking. And so, you know, you said for the supporters of Mr. Iglesias, we can keep it short, right? Let me live. Let me survive by retaining our City Manager, Peter Iglesias.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Alicia Fernandez.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Fernandez, good morning -- good afternoon, excuse me.

Alicia Fernandez: Good afternoon, Commissioners, Mayor. Congratulations to the new Commissioners. My name is Alicia Fernandez. I live at 6000 Granada Boulevard. I’ve been living in the City for approximately 40 years. And the reason I came is because when I read that they wanted to get rid of the City Manager, I thought it was a crazy idea because, Mr. Fernandez, you’ve only been here -- this is the second Commission meeting. And I do believe that as a Commission, you should all work together before you would bring any of this up and try to work with the City Manager as a Commissioner, which is new. And it’s better for the City for everybody

to work together than to be -- so I think this idea of getting rid of Peter right now, I don't think it's a good idea. I think you should all work together for the betterment of the City and try. You've only been here two weeks. So, give it time and work with the City Manager and see how it feels working directly with him instead of as a resident. As a resident, I've had to go to Peter for issues. I was able to solve all my -- solve the issues. It took time. It took two mayors, actually, and when Peter came, I was able -- finally able to solve the issue, and it was a big issue with the property behind my house. So, I -- my belief is you should give it a chance and try to work things, everybody as a whole, and not just today say no, I want -- we want to get rid of Peter Iglesias. No, give it a chance. He has been a good City Manager. And if I would be in there new, I would try to get to know him better and work with him and the whole Commission with the Manager, and that's my belief. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much.

Ms. Fernandez: I keep it short.

City Clerk Urquia: Aurelio Durana.

Aurelio Durana: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. Regarding the -- well, before I get into the dismissal of the City Manager, I want to point out to the City Attorney made a remark about a civility code that applies to the audience. I would like to point out before that City Code - - City -- civility code is applied to the audience that it not be applied selectively. If you roll back the tape to this morning after Dr. Gomez (INAUDIBLE) to the City Manager, there is at least one City official applauding loudly the remarks of Dr. Gomez. So, I suggest you start by cleaning house. Secondly, there's a lady here that supposedly Maria Cruz claims every time Maria walks past her, calls her Satan. I brought that to the attention of the City Attorney. Nothing has been done. Now, to the matter at hand, and I'd like to -- I'd like to focus on issues dear to my heart. It's what I consider the unconscionability of the City Manager when it comes with dealing with senior citizens and the handicapped. The senior citizens, as everybody knows, were kicked out of

the Youth Center to the new adult activity center across from the Palace. Well, lo and behold, not too long ago, egged on by the Mayor, we had the City Manager that wanted to eliminate the free parking for the senior citizens who attend the adult activity center. Mind you, everybody who goes to the Youth Center parks there for free, even after the increase in fees, some of which I assume went to increase the salary of the City Manager and to increase his pension as well. We have -- I mentioned last night at the town hall meeting, the issue with the transponders for the emergency responders. Those will be the ones that will clear the way for them. The traffic lights would turn green. It will save lives, particularly those of us in most need of -- most likely need of emergency services, senior citizens, the handicapped. Nothing has been done. The City Manager has sat on it for four years. In the meantime, telling me repeatedly that, yes, it's on the desk of the fire chief. Okay, well, I guess it's going to die there. The issue with Freebee. We have Freebee picking up complete strangers, people who don't live in Coral Gables, picking them up at trolley stops on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. And from there, the Freebee drives past my home, 322 Alesio Avenue, to the Youth Center. I don't know what they do from there, but the Youth Center, I've heard Fred complain on numerous times that there is a lot of cars parked there. Okay, but the Freebee cannot pick us up. I mean, I don't know if that makes sense for anyone. We also have parking at the City garage where they want to put in the Mobility Hub. That elevator is broken half the time. Heaven forbid, as somebody pointed out last night, that a handicapped person makes it to the third floor, how are they going to get down? Even if they're able to negotiate the stairs, when those stairs were built, they're not up to any standards today. The steps -- I don't remember what they're called -- the steps are extremely narrow. Anybody with a size 11 shoe is going to stick out a couple of inches, okay, so you've got to watch your heel. The -- there's also, I think a state law, that the handicapped are allowed to park for free in city parking spaces. I know the City Manager hates that. He would like to revoke that to have the handicapped pay for parking just like anybody else. I understand some of you may think, why? You know, he doesn't look that handicapped or whatever. But that is the state of the law and it's something the City Manager does not like. Lastly, the country club, the issues with the country club, the swimming pool. I was a member at one time. I never noticed the swimming pool in dire need of such repairs. Regardless, you know, I defer to the experts. But what truly bothers me is that they're lobbying you to become a member

of the country club, and in the meantime, if you're in the swimming pool on a Saturday afternoon with your grandchildren, your family, whatever, they reserve the right to hold a special event and kick you out of the swimming pool, a resident, a paying member of the country club. I mean, Riviera doesn't do that. Coral Riviera Club doesn't do that. I don't know anybody else who's as greedy or as needy for resident dollars to be so disrespectful of the residents. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Lauren Dowlen.

Mayor Lago: Before we move on, Mr. Clerk, Mr. Manager, will you do me a favor, if you can? Will you not only educate the Commission as a whole, you can do it in an email later, but also speak with the gentleman who just came up. There's two issues that he talked about that are incorrect. Number one is the issue of the parking at the adult activity center. What we tried to do was have the visitors of the adult activity center use the valet, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: The valet is free.

Mayor Lago: The valet is free. So, what we were trying to do was have the residents who are visiting the adult activity center use the valet, which is free for anyone that wants to use it. And it's very convenient for a person who wants to step in and wants to be able to use and park at the adult activity center. That's number one.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Mayor. The valet is free, and the other parking costs us 40 to \$50,000 a year.

Mayor Lago: So, it costs the City 40 to \$50,000, and it's literally right across the -- it's right there. It's within 10, 15 feet. You're -- actually, it's even better. It's easier for the person who's coming to the adult activity center to use the valet. They don't have to spend a dollar and it saves the City \$50,000 a year. That's number one. Number two, we never kicked anybody out of the Youth

Center. We built the adult activity center to the tune of how many millions of dollars did we spend on that?

City Manager Iglesias: I think it was over half a million dollars, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And right now, all we get is complaints from people that there's not enough classes. We have so many classes there that are all full to the brim that we're trying to bring in more teachers. So, the adult activity center is getting immense amount of use, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, I think it's an opportunity to just clarify those things with the gentleman whenever you can because we're not trying to stop people from parking. We actually want there to be some savings for the City and offer a great amenity as valet. I think it's a good opportunity.

City Manager Iglesias: And those dollars were in dollars of yesteryear, not dollars of today...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Manager Iglesias: (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, will you --? The next person, please.

City Clerk Urquia: Lauren Dowlen.

Mr. Durana: Mr. Mayor, I'd like to reply because some of the statements -- you've made some misstatements.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Mr. Durana: Or there's a lack of complete disclosure as usual, transparency. The valet parking that you're referring to is across the street at the Palace. That's Andalusia Avenue. Yeah, I know you're a young man, you're very able. I am not, neither is my wife, okay? It would be placing her in danger to ask her to cross Andalusia Avenue. There's no crosswalk there. There's one of the little signs that everybody ignores, okay, instead of parking above. It's not my fault that the City -- I don't know if it was Mr. Iglesias or whoever was in charge when the Palace was built. That was an agreement that was negotiated with the Palace. And the AAC was supposed to come free of charge to the City. And the complimentary parking in the parking garage above the AAC was supposed to be included in the deal too. That we don't have administrators who can negotiate...

Mayor Lago: So...

Mr. Durana: With developers is not my fault.

Mayor Lago: Sir, if I may, if I may.

Mr. Durana: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your insight. Thank you for your insight. None of us who are here were in the decision-making process for the Palace and were here when it was built. That's number one. And number two, there is a light on Andalusia, as everyone is aware, and people can cross that street. And this is another decision that the Commission will have to make. Do you want to save \$50,000 a year and have the person -- have our residents park at the valet, which is a very easy opportunity for people to literally walk 30 feet into the adult activity center, which is a much longer process if you park within the actual parking garage. It's probably four or five times as long to get to the adult activity center when you could just park at the valet and have that beautiful amenity there and save the City \$50,000. When you're looking for money to do things like Burger

Bob's, these are where you're going to have to start making those tough decisions on whether you cut here, you cut here, offering an incredible amenity. I wish somebody would valet my car every single day when I went to work. And those are -- and those are opportunities that, you know, that we're going to have to deal with as a Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez: One of the concerns that I did hear during this campaign was from members who were concerned about somebody driving their car in an age of COVID. They were concerned about having somebody within their vehicle when...

Mayor Lago: I can address that for you.

Commissioner Fernandez: I mean, that's one of the concerns, so I think maybe -- I don't know when we can have that discussion.

Mayor Lago: I can address that for you. During COVID, the Manager and we had that conversation, and we decided not to move forward after talking to staff. We said, let's appease the residents. And you know, some of the elderly individuals were very concerned about COVID, that they didn't want somebody inside their car, but now it's -- we've moved on from COVID. And again, at the end of the day, if they feel uncomfortable, they can wear a mask or whatever they need to do, but they're still going into a facility that has over 100 people in it in the adult activity center and not wearing a mask. So, let's be also candid in regards to exposures. So, I understand it, it makes sense, but that's why we held off and we haven't made a decision, and that will be a decision that will be made by the Commission in an effort to find -- to try to find monies to deal with things like Burger Bob's, which are, again, on the front burner right now.

Commissioner Fernandez: When will we be having a conversation on this topic?

Mayor Lago: Whenever you like.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, can we put it on the next agenda?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, we can talk about that.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Talk about that and we can make a decision at the will of the Commission. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Lauren Dowlen.

Mayor Lago: Sorry about that, I apologize. Excuse me. Good afternoon.

Lauren Dowlen: Good afternoon. My name is Lauren Dowlen. I live at 1460 Cecilia Avenue. I have been a resident of Coral Gables since 2016, I think. But I've been working in Coral Gables and volunteering for many civic organizations since 2004. I don't want to speak on behalf of thousands of residents, but I will speak on behalf, I think, of myself. And I've never had a problem with the City Manager, ever. With all of my civic organizations and my work here and my involvement in the City of Coral Gables and as a resident, I've just never had a problem with any of his staff or the departments or what he oversees. And I just wanted to be able to say that today. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.

City Clerk Urquia: Raul Valdes-Fauli.

Mayor Lago: Mayor Valdes-Fauli, what a privilege it is to have you here today.

Raul Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here on the other side of the dais, and I'm here to address the G-3, the request by -- or the item put on the agenda by a new -- one of the newest Commission members, Ariel Fernandez, to remove the City Manager. This, despite Mr. Fernandez having been sworn into office only two, three weeks ago and never having to work -- never having worked with the City Manager. It was part of his campaign platform and he's making good on bringing it up, which I respect. Mr. Fernandez may have personal disagreements with the City Manager, but I served with him for three years, and he's been the City Manager for five years. And there has been nothing but an exemplary -- an exemplary performance of his duties. He served as assistant City Manager for two years and has worked for the City for many more years. And we had Commissioner Withers here telling us some of his exemplary performances. I've known him for 20 years, or over 20 years, and know his conduct to be nothing less than exemplary and his efficiency nothing less than exemplary. Under his administration, Coral Gables has become a wonderful city, a model for the management of operations and city services for Miami-Dade County. Our police, we have the safest city, or the second safest city, taking Key Biscayne off, which I -- that has its own particularities, the safest city in the county. With fire rescue, six-minute response time, and I was personally affected by that because a grandson of mine was -- his life was saved because of the response and because of the wonderful performance by our Fire Department. Waste pickup, we have 50,000 residents, about 30,000 homes, and we touch each one of those homes four times a week. That's 150 visits, 150 times a year -- 150,000 times a year going to the backyards, and that works perfectly. There may be a dropped banana peel here and there, but 150,000 times our waste management touches every home in the city. Technology and environment, public access to electric vehicle charging stations, and providing the Fire Department with life-saving telemedicine services for emergency responders, that was part of our City Manager's performance. They mentioned construction and budgeting. Our Public Safety Building was built under budget and ahead of schedule. It was a huge project, the biggest we've had in Coral Gables in many, many years, and under budget and on schedule, as well as this building next to us. I respectfully request that the members of the Commission consider the motives by which Mr. Fernandez is making his claims and counter those with the City Manager,

Mr. Iglesias' successful record and make the right decision, which would be to retain Mr. Iglesias in the position of City Manager. Thank you very much for your attention.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor.

City Clerk Urquia: Joseph Martucci.

Mayor Lago: Good morning. Welcome to the City.

Commissioner Castro: Good afternoon.

Mayor Lago: Oh, good afternoon. Again, I apologize.

Joseph Martucci: Good afternoon. Joe Martucci, 430 Mendoza Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida. I've been a resident of Coral Gables for well over 40 years. I've come here today -- I don't know the City Manager. I don't have any horse in this race, but I've come here because I am not happy or satisfied by the timing and the manner in which this came up. It has an appearance that looks too much like the City of Miami politics to me. I'm here, I've listened to all the people. I have not seen one bit of evidence that the City Manager has done anything illegal, that he's done malfeasance, misfeasance, that he's violated his oath, that he's done anything whatsoever wrong. I've heard from some people that may pretend that they represent the majority of Coral Gables, but there's no evidence. Even the Coral Gables Neighbor Association, they have no evidence that they represent the majority or have due -- dues paying people that they represent more than 50 percent here. In addition, there's absolutely no one here that can say why someone voted for or against the two latest Commissioners, whether it's the Coral Gables Neighbors Association. You have no idea why people vote for someone or against someone. Maybe they don't like negative mailers. So, there is not really some sort of strong groundswell from the community to get rid of the City Commissioner [sic]. I think it's improper. It looks as though it is a small but vocal group of people that just don't like Peter Iglesias. Someday, they're not going to like somebody else that

works here. And I don't think that's the standard. I don't know. I'm sure that Commissioner Fernandez is not going to give us the legal requirements to fire somebody. But if it's just because you don't like them, I don't know if that is complying with local or state or federal law or if it gets due process. At the same time, I would say just because somebody is difficult -- and we assume that he's difficult -- that is completely different from being wrong. Classic example I used everywhere when I was in Miami Law School is Abraham Lincoln, one of the most difficult people as far as getting rid of slavery and keeping the union together, but he was right. And so, I think if you want to get rid of the City Manager, at least come in here and give us some evidence and documents that he's done something wrong. And if you want to say there's a groundswell out there, well, I've heard some people say maybe we should take a poll and send out mailers and actually have evidence in front of us that the people of Coral Gables want to get rid of them. Absent that, I just think it's highly improbable -- improper and just sort of looks like the City of Miami to get rid of somebody that you don't like. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Brett...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Brett Gillis.

Brett Gillis: Good afternoon, everybody. Brett Gillis. I don't like how this has become kind of a spectacle. I happen to like the City Manager as a person, but this really isn't about that. It's about direction for the City moving forward. I think that the two new Commissioners, we're going to rely on you to help provide information. You were the ones that were knocking door to door, talking to the residents, getting the -- getting the dissatisfaction with the direction of the City over the past few years. I think that there's been a total lack of efficiency. We've been consistently over budget and behind schedule. Key City assets have not been maintained in the way that they

should be. I went over the list yesterday at the town hall, but I'll mention it again. The Gondola building collapsed. The Fink Studio, we're now going on six to seven years for the renovation of that. Coral Gables Museum continues to have leaks, paint falling, you know, this is a museum, it relies heavily on the walls needing to be able to be used. Venetian Pool, with the crumbling infrastructure and arches there, the floor of the pool. It was closed for repairs and then they weren't done. The Alhambra Water Tower, City Hall, of course, the building that we're in, the windows continue to be neglected here year after year after year when we know that they need to be restored. This building is on the National Register of Historic Places, one of the few buildings in the City that we have that these windows should not be allowed to deteriorate to the point that they cannot be replaced. Burger Bob's, the Country Club, we talked about that earlier today. Just some other things that have really bothered me. The Flagler section of the City has been promised for close to a decade, that they were getting their streetscape. You know, it's not fair that that neighborhood -- I don't live in that neighborhood. I don't have any relatives there, any business there. I just feel that that's been an area that's been neglected consistently, and it's not the way that the City should be operated. The Alhambra Circle business section, we have a total disgrace there. The sidewalks, the streets, that's a great -- gives you a great image of how I think many residents feel in certain other areas of the city as well about the condition of streets, sidewalks. So, I just think that we need a new direction for the City and thank you for your consideration.

Mayor Lago: So, you mentioned the Fink Studio, one second. You said that it's taken six or seven years, I'm confused.

Mr. Gillis: Correct.

Mayor Lago: Am I...?

Mr. Gillis: What year did we buy the Fink Studio in? It still hasn't gotten its COA, it's still not open.

Mayor Lago: What do you mean it's not open? Staff's using it.

City Manager Iglesias: It's on TCO. We're waiting for the restoration of the (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Staff's using it.

Mr. Gillis: It's open to the public? I was told it wasn't. I had a banker that contacted me a few weeks ago that wanted to come to potentially set up a business and buy a home in Coral Gables. I tried to set up an appointment to go there.

City Manager Iglesias: It has the TCO; it's open to the public.

Mr. Gillis: No, it is not, that's a lie. Where is Letitia?

City Manager Iglesias: It has a TCO.

Mayor Lago: Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on. Suramy Cabrera is the building official. Please.

Development Services Director Cabrera: It has had a TCO for a few months now.

Mayor Lago: And in our industry, if you have a TCO, you're open to the public.

Mr. Gillis: Okay, then why aren't we -- why aren't we having meetings there? I was told it is not. I mean, that's a public record.

Mayor Lago: Who told you?

Mr. Gillis: The Economic Development staff.

Mayor Lago: Okay, well, can you have --? They're here.

Mr. Gillis: (INAUDIBLE) is here?

Mayor Lago: Is somebody from Economic Development here? I don't know. I don't -- I mean, who's the one that told -- who's the staff member that told you? I need to know on the record because you seem so vividly -- you make a statement on the record. You vividly made a statement.

Mr. Gillis: I'm going to look it up right now to give you the exact information.

Mayor Lago: And so, why don't you take a seat and then we can do that. By the way, the Gondola building, the funding has already been provided by the State. I went and procured that with my colleagues on the Commission, Commissioner Menendez, and Commissioner Anderson. And we procured the funds from Tallahassee, and we have matching funds in the budget, and we will be proceeding to bring that building back to its original splendor. In regards to this building, as you're aware, but you failed to mention because it's not in your -- excuse me, sir, you failed to mention, maybe you forgot, the issue is that we replaced the roof in this building. What was the cost, Mr. Manager, in regards to the -- how much we spent to replace the roof?

City Manager Iglesias: About \$600,000.

Mayor Lago: \$600,000. The next thing that we're doing is replacing the windows. I went to Tallahassee with my colleagues on the Commission. We attempted to get eight projects funded this year. We got seven out of the eight projects funded. The only one that we did not get funded was the windows. Took me four trips to Tallahassee this year and four trips last year. We are trying to do our best with the windows, it's a million-dollar project, but this all goes back -- and that's what I'm excited about my colleagues, Commissioner Fernandez and Commissioner Castro. When the budget process happens, along with a \$2 million insurance increase this year to the tune

of 37 percent, along with millions of dollars that we have renegotiated for our general employees after a compensation study was done, and we had to pay our employees more money because they deserve it. We will now sit down, and I'm looking forward to their guidance and their leadership. They're going to provide us with what we need to attack the Alhambra Water Tower, to attack the windows, to attack all the projects that you're talking about are going to be funded and are going to be addressed this issue. They're going to be done. They're going to be taken care of. And I'm so happy that they're here because they're the ones that are going to provide the leadership with my colleagues on the Commission, and I want you to help me on that, Brett. What I would love for you, Mr. Gillis, is to come and be part of the process as we embark on the budgeting process and help us find the funding or cut from other areas in the City or reduce whatever you think is appropriate so that we can get the necessary funding to address. Let's talk about the Flagler Section, which is critically important. I've met with the Flagler residents probably half a dozen times, and we've discussed opportunities on how to address the needs of those residents. The issue is, and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Manager, what we discussed in the Flagler Section is that it could be to the -- how much money do you think it would cost to do the Flagler Section?

City Manager Iglesias: It would depend, Mayor. It could be \$5 million to \$15 million, depending on what the (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Same thing we're facing -- same thing that we're facing with Biltmore Way, depending on the scope and breadth. The residents in that area have had community meetings. They're discussing whether they want sidewalks, whether they want canopy, whether they want a median, what do they want exactly for those areas. You're talking about tens of millions of dollars. Do they deserve it? 110 percent. Do we do it as a special taxing district? Do we do it as -- do we do it as --? Where do we find the money? Do we budget for it over a five-year period? Or do we raise taxes on everyone in this community? We haven't raised taxes in the City in over a decade. I've said I will not raise taxes. We need to find the money, and I think that my colleagues who are here have been very, very open about pushing forward all these historic projects. Just like when I found the Fink Studio -- when I found the Fink Studio from a realtor that was about to put it on

the market, I brought it to Cathy, then City Manager, and we purchased the Fink Studio to the tune of two and a half million dollars. How much did we spend on the Fink Studio renovation?

City Manager Iglesias: Over two million.

Mayor Lago: Over two million. So, in that building, we have sunk four and a half million dollars on that historic gem to make sure that it's something beautiful for this community. So, trust me, \$600,000 on the roof, all the issues that we're addressing, if you can tell me by analyzing the budget -- and I can give you a copy of the budget. It's online for (INAUDIBLE).

Mr. Gillis: I've reviewed the budget.

Mayor Lago: If you can tell me where we can find the necessary money to attack all those projects, I'll make it my priority on day one.

Mr. Gillis: Well, no, I have to thank you. You've been -- I mean, with the White Way Lights, we thank you continuously.

Mayor Lago: Oh, yeah, White Way Lights. We did the White Way Lights, too.

Mr. Gillis: And those may not be here if it were not for you, so we...

Mayor Lago: No, no, I don't deserve the credit.

Mr. Gillis: You know...

Mayor Lago: What I'm excited about -- you know who deserves the credit? Chip Withers deserves the credit. You know who deserves the credit? Raul Valdes-Fauli, Cason, Frank Quesada, Mike Mena, Jorge Fors, Slesnick, you know, Jeannett Slesnick. And I'm forgetting many, many people

who have served this community. All the employees, all the people like you, the Villagers, the -- you know, the people who have taken a stand on issues. Don't -- I don't deserve any of the credit. We found ways to get things done. But what I'm excited about is that this Commission is moving forward. We're going to find a way to fund everything. But if you tell me that we haven't -- you know what we did? You know how we funded the White Way Lights? I want you to tell them. I want you to tell every single person here how we funded the White Way Lights. Where did we take money from? You know where we took money from? Something that's near and dear to my heart. We took how much? A million dollars from the Art in Public Places Fund.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Instead of buying art, we went and we took a million dollars to do the White Way Lights. And those beautiful White Way Lights that hadn't been restored in decades, through the leadership of Raul, through the leadership of Jim, through now the leadership, through the leadership of Ariel Fernandez talking to me about it, through the leadership of every single person in the Villagers, in the garden club, we were able to get it done. And we have a lot of work to do, and we don't have an endless amount of money, but I'm excited about what you're going to bring to the table in identifying things in the budget to get all these things done. That's what I'm excited about.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, and we also have the historical TDRs.

Mayor Lago: Oh, yeah.

City Manager Iglesias: That hopefully may produce up to maybe \$5 million worth...

Mayor Lago: That'll be great.

City Manager Iglesias: Of funding for...

Mayor Lago: And we can use that money -- we could -- we said the historical TDRs, we want to use them to address issues like this.

Mr. Gillis: Almost every major asset, historical resource in this city -- I gave you the list -- they've all reached a period of extreme neglect. So, that's why you have to look at the amount of money that that's going to cost. Why did it get to this point? This is mismanagement. That's what it is. They are not being maintained like they should be. You know, who's the picture behind you on the wall? George Merrick. You know, he spent -- one of the wealthiest men in America when he developed this city. He died paying off his mother's funeral expenses. He was basically broke.

Mayor Lago: He was broke.

Mr. Gillis: His money, his fortune went into this city, and this is how we treat it. It's not acceptable. I don't think it's respectful. It's not how things should be done, you know. We find money for all these things. I think you have a great idea with the art acquisition that, you know, these -- some of the public art that we have, the plazas, entrances, Venetian Pool, that's -- I mean, the only thing that even holds a candle to it in America, or even maybe in the world, is the Hearst Castle pool. You know, this is a piece of art, but they still have reached this point. I mean, I went over the list. I don't know what more I can do. It -- when you allow buildings and neglect to this point -- we've had a difference in opinion on the windows in this building. This building is on the National Register of Historic Places. It has the original wooden windows. Think of the environmental consequence of ripping all the windows in here out, throwing them away, the glass, all of that. The windows are one of the character-defining features of this building, and it's the only feature that's really appreciated from both the outside and the inside, that's why it's such a key feature. Yet, you know, this City doesn't seem to have the money or find the money to want to preserve them. If we were...

Mayor Lago: It's not an issue about preserving them, it's an issue of -- it's an issue of not only the preservation of the windows and addressing the windows, it's also about the structural integrity that comes with the windows. And...

Mr. Gillis: This building was built in what year? '27?

Mayor Lago: What's the point?

Mr. Gillis: It's been through every hurricane. What hurricane has ruined -- has destroyed the windows in this building?

Mayor Lago: These are wooden windows. At the end of the day -- listen, at the end of the day, we're going to find it, that's why we made it a priority in Tallahassee. We're going to find money to address the issue, but we're going to have to make very, very tough decisions whether we fund certain things in the budget or we don't. And at the end of the day, it's a balancing act, because by the way, these windows are not \$200,000. These windows are over seven figures to get it done here. So -- and also, just like Chip Withers led the charge to address the Alhambra Water Tower, that number is not \$500,000. That is a monumental lift right now as a result of that being a wire lath structure, as you know. And we're going to have to figure out a way to address that issue. And that's going to continue to be an issue because it'll -- we'll fix it, and it will deteriorate in the next 20 years in the same situation. So, it -- historic preservation is a beautiful thing, but it's a constant work in progress. And we have to be honest with ourselves. And while you want to address all these issues immediately...

Mr. Gillis: Not immediately.

Mayor Lago: That's why we have a great -- but that's why...

Mr. Gillis: For the past ten year -- my whole life.

Mayor Lago: Yes, but hold on one second. We've addressed the entrance features in the City. We bought new entrance features. We addressed the Fink Studio. We addressed the White Way Lights. We addressed the Coral Gables Country Club.

Mr. Gillis: None of those have been complete, only the plazas and entrances.

Mayor Lago: Hold on, hold on. Hold on a minute. They're being worked on. And Fink Studio was completed. It's in a TCO. It's going to be in a CO. And we have our Economic Development Director here who will give you a little bit further insight in regards to that.

Mr. Gillis: Yeah, I did want to -- that would be my last point because...

Mayor Lago: So, I mean, I think what you...

Mr. Gillis: I'm sorry to take up so much time.

Mayor Lago: But you've -- again, you've come to see me every single time. I've met with you. We've addressed issues.

Mr. Gillis: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: You've never been neglected in an opportunity to sit down with myself or my colleagues in the Commission or with staff. I've even gone to your own home to be with you, okay. So, I want to address the issues too. Our historic integrity is critically important. But if you've got 30, \$40 million that you can find for me, I'm willing to take it right now.

Mr. Gillis: I did -- before I leave, though, I want to solve this thing about Fink Studio.

Mayor Lago: You know where the 30, \$40 million is? Would you like to know? I can tell you where it is. There is 30, \$40 million. It's in the pension, and we spend it every year. Over \$30 million a year is spent when we shouldn't be spending that money. And last year, we spent six million additional on the 13th check. You know what we're budgeting for this year? We're budgeting \$8.5 million to ensure that the employees, our police and fire and our general employees, that when I'm gone and every single person on this Commission is gone, we can leave here with our head held up high that we didn't turn a blind eye to our fiscal responsibility here in the City. So, remember that. When one day somebody here in five, ten years will be serving, they should have over \$20 million of additional monies every single year once we put our pension in a position where it's sustainable. Because when I walked in here, our pension was funded to 51 percent, and now we're nearing, God willing, in the high 70s, okay? So, that has taken a significant amount of commitment by the staff, by the staff. And when you have to balance fixing a sidewalk, we're spending millions on sidewalks, we're spending millions on traffic calming, you just can't throw \$10 million into sidewalks one year. You can't throw \$10 million. I want to get it all addressed. I want to address the issues that you mentioned. So, should I take it from -- should I take it from the un -- should I take it from the unfunded liability and not pay that \$8.5 million? That's the problem.

Mr. Gillis: I can stand here for an hour going back and forth. The building next door, municipalities around the country are downsizing their office space, okay. Here in Coral Gables, we expanded to a building next door.

Mayor Lago: I'll give you an answer for that. You know why I did that? You know why we did that? Very clear. Because I wanted to take pressure -- the City wanted to take the pressure off a historic building. That when you walk up the stairs, look at the stairs, how worn down they are and how it looks. The reason why we had over 100 people in this building working here like sardines. And if it wasn't for Ms. Cabrera and the Manager who moved everybody from 427, moved them into this building who had a leaky roof and no one had fixed in 40 years and got it taken care of for \$600,000, I would have rather spent those \$600,000 on sidewalks. I would have

rather spent it on traffic calming, but I spent it on a roof to ensure that this building was appropriately protected from water damage. So, what happened? Then everybody left this building after we finished 427 and we moved everybody to that building so we can release the pressure and the wear and tear on this incredibly important building. So, there's two sides to every story. You can't say we're not trying. You can't say we haven't had an open door for you. And we're dedicating millions...

Mr. Gillis: I didn't say (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: And millions and millions of money.

Mr. Gillis: I -- my comments were not directed at the Commission. It was on the Administration and the direction but...

Mayor Lago: But we can't be vague. We can't be vague (INAUDIBLE).

Mr. Gillis: The Fink Studio, I did want to hear the answer to that because there were some things that were said here that were not correct.

Mayor Lago: Madam Director, would you be so kind?

City Manager Iglesias: We have on...

Mr. Gillis: We're going on seven years now.

City Manager Iglesias: On the Fink Studio, Mayor, we have a beautiful conference room in the back. I've asked -- the director has already -- is hiring an interior designer because we really -- it's not ready for meetings because I believe we need to refurnish it properly. And so, the director

is working with an interior designer to get that done. It's a big budget issue, so we have to work again within budgets. But...

Mayor Lago: Madam Director...

City Manager Iglesias: I do believe, and you've seen the drawings of that room, it can be spectacular. It's not there yet because we really can't meet there now. It doesn't have the furniture.

Mayor Lago: Outside of that room, outside of that room -- and I'm not crazy, okay? I'm not. Because I walked by that the other day on Wednesday night. That building is done. There's people working in that building.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Yes.

Mayor Lago: There's a reception desk.

Development Services Director Cabrera: Yes.

Mayor Lago: I looked in, I walked in. There's people there so...

City Manager Iglesias: Since the inaugural of the building.

Mayor Lago: When was that?

Unidentified Speaker: March 2022.

Mayor Lago: March of 2022. So, we're over a year already that that building -- excuse me, this is what I do for a living. I do construction. We get TCOs in a hurry so that we can get people into buildings. There are people working in that building. Please don't...

Mr. Gillis: You can't have a public meeting though.

Mayor Lago: At the end of the day, you can have a public meeting in my office if you'd like.

Mr. Gillis: No, I want to have it at the Fink Studio.

Mayor Lago: The bottom line is you're fixated on this one building. There's opportunities for you to have public meetings in any building that you would like. But there's a certain protocol that staff is wanting to take and that's fine. But is the building operational? Can somebody walk in?

Development Services Director Cabrera: Yes, so...

Mayor Lago: Can somebody conduct business in that building?

Development Services Director Cabrera: Mayor, so this particular instance that Mr. Gillis is talking about had to do with this particular day that he wanted to come in, that there was a prospective business owner that wanted to potentially invest in the City. And he wanted to have a meeting at Fink. At that moment in time, we couldn't have it, that meeting at the Fink. There were contractors in there. There was a walk-through happening of the space. And for that reason, we didn't have it. Now, like I told him, we sell the City, not the building. We can have meetings anywhere. We weren't always in a historic area. We were in a private office since I've been here with Economic Development. We conduct business wherever it is. And I even offered to go, and I booked the conference room down here at City Hall to be able to hold that meeting here, but it didn't happen. So, we are -- we're very happy to do any meetings at the Fink but knowing that there's still some activity that's happening there and we need to work around it. So...

City Manager Iglesias: It was the restoration of the front windows that took quite a bit of time because they were being restored, but it could be used. However, I don't think it's appropriate to be using it now until we have interior designer and create the space that we've talked about. The director has already or has engaged or will be engaging an interior designer. And that's a big budget issue because that's a huge space. I think it could be spectacular based on the renderings, but we have to spend the money to get all the interior work done. But the building has been occupied, again, since its inaugural.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, thank you. Thank you, Madam Director. Is there anything that I can help you with? Anything else I can help you with?

Mr. Gillis: It's a two-story building from the 1920s. Thank you again for the Commissioners and -- that purchased it, but we're going on six, seven years now that this building has not been able to have a public meeting or hold a board meeting for certain boards like the International Affairs Board. Anyway, thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I have a -- I have a...

Commissioner Fernandez: As we...

Commissioner Castro: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: Said last night, this will be on the agenda next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Castro: I have a question. Is there any way that we can implement a process that, let's say, every five years or every ten years, we're looking into how to restore so that 20 years passes by, or 15 years passes by, and then this -- it's a huge amount of money that we need to budget for. Maybe if we have a process of, you know, a check of every five years to see if we could replace or restore things, it's not going to really affect us that much.

City Manager Iglesias: We do have a way of doing that. It's just a very large amount of money. And there needs to be a decision on how to spend our budget. Do we spend it on a park? Or do we spend it on a historical building? And those are issues that the Commission needs -- really truly needs to decide because our historical buildings are beautiful, but they cost a lot of money to maintain. The water tower every 10 years will be a couple of million dollars.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

City Manager Iglesias: It's just the way it's constructed, out of frame construction. Buildings that are older, they take -- they have a lot of money because the deterioration rate is faster. So, I think it becomes -- it becomes a big issue as to where do we spend the resources that we have.

Mayor Lago: You know what we did and also -- and I'd love for staff to share this with you, I think it's important, is that maybe the Historic Department can share what we did in regards to the Biltmore. In regards to the Biltmore, instead of getting paid our fees by the individual who holds the lease, that money was redirected into the structure. Millions of dollars, instead of coming into the City coffers, were used to replace windows, re-stucco, paint, fix areas, and we monitor that, staff monitor that to tell us, look, these are the areas that we worked on to ensure that that historic gem, which is owned by the City, was not falling into disrepair.

City Manager Iglesias: And we are still doing that, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: That's the problem when you...

City Manager Iglesias: Approximately 800,000 a year, up to a \$5 million budget.

Mayor Lago: So, what I'm saying is can you do me a favor and please advise the Commission on where we are with that and give us an update on that, so they understand a little bit about what's going on. Maybe they have some input.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Maybe they have some guidance they can give us on that.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think, to Commissioner Castro's point, the problem we keep hearing is this is a large budget item. This is a large budget item. But it's a large budget item because we've neglected it for year upon year upon year. The water tower is falling apart, but we've known that for over five years. If we look at the capital improvement plan, which has been shared with us already, we're not planning on doing anything for another five years. So, will we have a water tower, or will we have another Gondola building? You know, and it's great that -- I mean, you did great work on going up to Tallahassee and getting funding for the Gondola building right away, but the repairs of the Gondola building wouldn't have been as much as it's going to be to rebuild the structure somewhat of what it used to be. We've really lost a treasure because of the neglect of the Manager and his team, plain and simple.

Mayor Lago: Can I answer that? So, that's the great thing about democracy. That's the beautiful thing about our Commission. There's a new Commission. And the Commission now will prioritize what is important and what is not. At that point, we made it as a Commission, a priority to do -- spend \$8 million on Phillips Park. That was a priority for myself. That was a priority for Commissioner Menendez, for Commissioner Anderson. I made it a priority to redo our parks. We had an outcry from residents, families, as our city became a lot younger. We want our parks to be at a level that they're not. So, we invested millions and millions and millions of dollars in regards to our parks. We said, hey, we're having issues with traffic calming. So, what did I do? I went with the Manager. I take responsibility for that. We're saying that why did we neglect certain things? Perfect, I take responsibility for it. What did I do? I went with the leadership of Suramy

Cabrera and our Manager and our police chief and we went to the County. We lowered the speed limit to 25 miles an hour, and we got a blanket approval, a blanket approval after doing a study for traffic calming throughout the City. Our Public Works Department killed themselves to accomplish this goal. And what did we do? We put \$1.5 million a year for installation of traffic calming devices. Let's scratch that and let's put that money -- let's put that money to do the water tower. Or when we said, how are we going to find money, how are we going to address the issues of sidewalks? We upped the amount of money on sidewalks. Maybe we shouldn't have done that. Maybe we should have allocated the funds to address issues of the water tower, or we should have done things to allocate issues of historic preservation. But you know, it's a balancing act. It's a balancing act, and we're at a point -- we're at an inflection point, where we're sitting here saying, I don't want to raise taxes, but I have so many things we have to address. What do we do? We can do a bond referendum. I opposed the bond referendum. I thought it was not the appropriate time in the situation that we're in, and so do my colleagues. We have to find ways to find money. Either you're raising taxes or you're cutting -- or you're cutting services. Would you like to start picking up garbage in the front of the house? We could save \$6 million. Mr. Manager, how much could we save?

City Manager Iglesias: About \$5 million, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: We could save \$5 million if we start doing what every other municipality does. And we would have \$5 million for historic preservation right there, reoccurring a year. We can put it right into historic preservation. But you've got to put your garbage in the front, take it to the front. A one-armed bandit comes and will take the garbage there from you. Save \$5 million a year. I have another opportunity for you. We can get rid of trash pits and get rid of all the illegal dumping that's happening here. I don't want to get rid of trash pits, but guess what? We could save millions of dollars doing that too, but people like that. So, there's a lot of things that we could do. And by the way, I'm going to give you another one, another opportunity. You want to save millions of dollars a year, which is a great opportunity? We could privatize our library. By the way -- don't look at me surprised -- five other cities in Miami-Dade County have privatized their libraries.

Hialeah has done it. And guess what? Potentially could save a few million bucks a year. We own the property. It's a historic building. These are all things that we could do to save money, but we don't want to do them because we enjoy these luxuries in our city because we are the City Beautiful, and we want people to come and pick up our garbage in the back. We want to have a trash pit. So, where are we going to get the money from? That's what I'm excited about. We have two outstanding Commissioners that are here that have the voice of the people. They're here to lead. They're here to give us examples of where we can save money. What can we do? Tell me. I'm more than able.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I don't think that it's -- you mentioned that the Commission didn't give the directive.

Mayor Lago: No, I gave the direction.

Commissioner Fernandez: Commissioner Anderson visited the Gondola building several months before and asked staff to take immediate action to remediate the situation and prevent it collapsing.

Mayor Lago: I'll answer that for you.

Commissioner Fernandez: And -- just give me a second. And not a single action was taken.

Mayor Lago: I'll answer that for you.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I think she wanted to say a word.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Mayor, give me one sec. Let her answer, then we'll go to you, Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I visited the site, the vertical cracks in the building was pretty clear that it structurally was unsound, okay. There was no amount of band-aids you could put on it at that point to save it, okay? That was my opinion.

Mayor Lago: You could have shored up the building -- and this is what I do for a living. You could have shored up the building and it would have collapsed. The problem that we have here was that it was neglected, and it's not their fault. They just showed up here two years ago. Blame it on me. We have to make decisions. What are we going to do here? What are we going to do here? We have to spend millions and millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars on things that are needs. And that's what I'm excited about, having new leadership here who is excited about saying we're going to find new revenue streams and we're going to push this forward. By the way, let me remind everybody here, please, if I may, and I take a lot of pride in this, my colleagues, Commissioner Menendez, Commissioner Anderson, and myself, we went to Tallahassee four times last year and we brought back four and a half million dollars. You know how much the City has brought back? The highest it's ever brought back from Tallahassee? Mr. Manager? Not even a million, right?

City Manager Iglesias: A million and a half, I think.

Mayor Lago: A million and a half was the most. We went to Washington. Then this year we went four times again and went to Washington again. We got an earmark from the Washington - - we're still waiting right now for that to be processed, but it's something between -- about \$5 million?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, \$4 million.

Mayor Lago: \$4 million from Washington. And also, we got seven out of eight projects funded through the State. One of the projects that was funded last year was the Gondola building, was the money for the Gondola building. Thank you to Senator Avila who brought that home for us. And

Demi, who did an incredible job representing us, and the Governor for not vetoing any of these issues. So, I'm excited. I'm excited about you guys coming to Tallahassee, about you guys using your resources in Washington to bring in millions of dollars here to the City because I don't know where else to find the money to do all these projects, except for -- we could always do it, if you guys want to do it. I'd like to see who proposes it. Who wants to raise taxes? That's what I'm excited about. Is anybody here willing to raise taxes on the residents?

Commissioner Fernandez: Arguably, we've been raising taxes every year. We've kept the millage rate the same.

Mayor Lago: Let's roll it back.

Commissioner Fernandez: But taxes have gone up every year. I mean...

Mayor Lago: We should roll...

Commissioner Fernandez: If we're going to have a frank conversation about the topic, that's a frank conversation about the topic and I appreciate you taking responsibility for the Gondola building, but it's not your responsibility. We have -- as a Commission, we need to be able to trust the Manager and staff to bring issues to our attention so that we can take the actions we need to take. And most of the time we're not. We have members of the community, like Mr. Gillis, who are bringing things to our attention and that's how a lot of things come to our plate. We need to make sure that our staff is telling us, hey, the Gondola building is in a condition that we need to take immediate action to prevent it collapsing, to not have to go -- so when we go to Tallahassee, get \$750,000 for renovations, we cover the full expense. Instead of getting \$750,000, now having to get \$750,000 from our municipal budget, and that was last year's estimate. As you've well explained, the costs have gone up year upon year, so we don't even know if \$1.5 million is going to do it right now.

Mayor Lago: If I may respond to you, okay. On two fronts, number one, as the Manager will tell you, in Tallahassee, they only fund 50 percent of the projects. So, it doesn't matter, if it costs \$1.5 million, they're only going to give us 750. So, we got the max we could have gotten, so it's not an issue about getting \$1.5 million. We would have had to put the other half anyways at the end of the day. And again, this is the great thing about our democracy and about our new Commission. Every single Commissioner here was made aware of issues that are happening in the City. Every single one of us gets a phone call from the police chief when something happens in this community before anybody else. It goes down the hierarchy: the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, and the Commissioners. The Manager does the same thing with briefings, and you will start having those briefings with the Manager, God willing, and so will you. You will have these meetings, and they will tell you, look these are issues, these are capital plan, these are things that we're facing. How do you want to address this? And then they give you a matrix -- they give you a matrix, and you sit here, and you vote on issues. Hey, what's your priority, Vince? My priority's been sidewalks. My priority has been traffic calming, has been parks, that's been my priority. And then I also made White Way Lights one year a priority. We were short money, and we were able to find a way to use Art in Public Places funds to do it. So, you're going to -- that is something that is afforded to the entire Commission. We are notified of distress issues in the City, from roadway distress, Venetian Pool. These are all things that now, as a Commissioner, you're going to have the luxury to be firsthand making that decision. And that's the great part about it. Now, we're not looking from the outside. You're truly in the inside now. And now you will have to make a decision on what is the priority. Is it what Mayor Valdes-Fauli's about to tell us is an issue in his neighborhood, or it's whether what Brett Gillis is going to tell you is an issue -- is a major issue. I have always gone -- and I hate to say this and I'm sorry -- but always gone with public safety. I've always gone with fire stations, traffic calming, and then has gone parks, and has gone, you know, things in that magnitude, because at the end of the day, you can't compensate in regards to public safety. That's something that I have to live with my conscience if somebody gets electrocuted at a park or something happens, or somebody falls or there's an issue. And that's -- I know that both of you are going to have to make some very tough decisions. And that is part of being in the seat and you're not shy about it. So, Mr. Mayor...

Commissioner Fernandez: Commissioner Anderson had a question.

Mr. Valdes-Fauli: I wanted to address -- I wanted to address the water tower issue. I was Commissioner from '85 to '89 and then Mayor from 2003 for eight years 'til -- I'm sorry, '93 to 2001, and then again for four years, in '17 to '21. In '85, April of '85, I had just taken office, and one of our first actions was inaugurating the restored water tower, '85. First time that water tower had been restored. And under Elie Nogichoni (phonetic), it was restored with the original paint, original materials, original whatever, which meant that the restoration lasted five, six, seven years, because it started to deteriorate again. We didn't use plastic paint or whatever it is that we could have. And since then, in my eight years as mayor, we had to restore it once again, in '90 something. And then in the last four years when I was Mayor, we didn't restore it, but we did such a great original, authentic restoration job that it ensured that we had to restore it every few years. We have not neglected the water tower.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, just...

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I have one moment.

Mayor Lago: Yes, Commissioner.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Regarding taxes, you know, and I walked the City not too long ago. I know there's some folks that want taxes lowered, but there's one thing I'm extremely proud of with this City. Despite having problems with hurricanes and COVID, where other cities were laying off employees and cutting back on services to the residences, this city did not. This city still kept functioning and maintained their employees, didn't raise taxes, and kept things running smoothly. Our residents wanted more police and wanted more firefighters. This Commission, the

last time around, added more police and more fire -- and firefighters. We do have to think about these priorities in a balance and be able to juggle them in a fashion where we can satisfy as many that we need. Police and Fire were one of my high priorities. I know it's a high priority of the prior Commission. We moved forward with the Fire Station 4 on Sunset because it's a life safety issue. We found the money. It's not an easy task to do. It's very difficult to say no to people on things of their priorities. A lot of sidewalks that I have griped about, we have a long way to go. It's going to be a continual maintenance feature, and I'm glad you're here to help solve these problems with us.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, Willy Bermello.

Mayor Lago: I think he may have stepped out.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay, so the next speaker is going to be...

Unidentified Speaker: Willy asked me to say something (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

Unidentified Speaker: He said he had to leave (INAUDIBLE). And he asked me to just cast his support for the City Manager.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. Next speaker is going to be on Zoom, Mr. Mayor. It's Mr. David Winker.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Winker, good afternoon.

David Winker: Good afternoon, Mayor. Good afternoon, Commissioners.

Commissioner Castro: Good afternoon.

Mr. Winker: David Winker. I moved my law office to Coral Gables in 2003, bought an office shortly thereafter. I represented countless clients in -- vis-à-vis the City of Coral Gables. I never once came close to suing the City of Coral Gables. That all changed recently. The attitude of the City toward its residents has been a hostile, if you don't like it, move. I represented the Carver parents who were accused of being racist by elected officials and City staff in these chambers in fighting the illegal Wawa development. Then Commissioner Michael Mena even accused me of filing a frivolous lawsuit, a lawsuit that was successful in stopping the Wawa and the illegal development order. This is just one of several lawsuits that have been successfully brought by residents against the City for breaking the law in recent years. The City Manager sets the tone of the City, and the tone set by City Manager Peter Iglesias is contempt for residents and their concerns and for special rules for special people. What happened at the beginning of this meeting was a perfect installation of what is happening at the City. A speaker in support of the City Manager was placed ahead of Maria Cruz who signed up first. Frankly, I should not exist. Residents should not be forced to bring lawsuits to get their city to follow its own laws. Residents should not have to hire lobbyists to be heard at City Hall. Residents should not fear retaliation for speaking out. Residents sent a clear message in this election. We need change, and we need it now. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next...

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, before we move on, I just -- Madam City Attorney, the gentleman who just spoke mentioned that there's multiple lawsuits that were brought by residents. Can you give me a little bit of clarity on that?

City Attorney Suárez: So, first, I would like to address that he mentioned that the lawsuit was successful by the parents of the students at Carver was successful in stopping the Wawa. The -- that litigation is pending. There was a motion to dismiss it was denied. It's my understanding that Wawa and Bahamian Village terminated their lease agreement. And so that's the status of that situation.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Attorney Suárez: I am not aware -- I heard him -- if I heard correctly, he said that was one of several successful lawsuits against the City. I don't know which several lawsuits he's referring to. Mr. Winker has represented plaintiffs in, I would say, in several lawsuits against the City, and on a variety of matters, some historic appeals and some others, but I don't know that there have been several successful lawsuits against the City.

Commissioner Fernandez: On the Wawa case, there was a decision by Judge Hantman, where he did say that your predecessor and the City Manager acted illegally though. That was -- that was what he said.

City Attorney Suárez: Commissioner, it was a denial of a motion to dismiss. I would prefer not to get into, you know, that discussion here since it is pending litigation.

Commissioner Fernandez: Okay.

City Attorney Suárez: But it was a denial of a motion to dismiss.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right.

Mayor Lago: All right.

City Clerk Urquia: Alfredo and Lourdes Wongden.

Mayor Lago: Are they on...?

Lourdes Wongden: Yes, hello.

Commissioner Castro: They're on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. Wongden: Hi.

Mayor Lago: Hi, how are you?

Ms. Wongden: (INAUDIBLE) Biltmore Way. My question is basically, you mentioned pensions, and we wanted to know with regards to the continuation of pensions for the general non-essential emergency personnel, and why the City is not phasing out this outdated practice and how it's spent on general (INAUDIBLE) for pensions? Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Madam Finance Director, Mr. City Manager, would you like to address her question in regards to pensions?

Finance Director Gomez: Good afternoon, Diana Gomez, Finance Director.

Mayor Lago: Would you -- would you do me a favor, Madam Director?

Finance Director Gomez: Sure.

Mayor Lago: Since we have the ear of everyone and we have two new Commissioners, can you explain what is the requirement in regards to pensions that we have to spend that we're obligated per the current employees? What is our unfunded liability requirements? And also, how much are we putting as additional 13th check in regards to the pension and what is the overall cost? And if we didn't have an unfunded liability and we didn't have to do that, what would we have right now in cash that we could spend on sidewalks, historic preservation? I'd like for you to put that on the record in detail as our Finance Director. Thank you.

Finance Director Gomez: Sure. I'm going to do my best because I don't have all these -- everything in front of me.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Finance Director Gomez: But so as of the latest valuation report, the unfunded liability of the pension system was \$156 million. So, every year -- so the annual contribution, the required City contribution is \$21.1 million. It's required. We must put in order to meet our obligations.

Mayor Lago: Can you break that down further?

Finance Director Gomez: By how would you like me to break that down?

Mayor Lago: I'd like to -- for you to break it down, what is our -- if we didn't have an unfunded liability...

Finance Director Gomez: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: What would we be paying?

Finance Director Gomez: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: That is a basic payment, Mayor.

Finance Director Gomez: Yeah. This is the all-in payment.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Finance Director Gomez: Right, so that required contribution comprises of the normal cost, and the normal cost is the normal cost to keep the fund going based on additional new employees joining the plan, meeting the normal -- the normal costs of the plan is the best way to say it. And then there's a portion of it that has to do with the payment of the unfunded liability. And so -- and I'm getting to that page, so bear with me. The -- okay, so the normal cost for the City's -- so the normal cost for the cost of the pension, there's the City's portion and then the employees' portion, right. The employees do pay a share. So, the total normal cost, the total normal cost is \$8.6 million. Of that, the member contributions is about \$4.5 million dollars, and the City's normal cost is about \$4.5 million dollars. So, the rest -- the balance of the \$21 million that I spoke about has to do with the payment of the prior legacy costs, the unfunded liability. So, if there was no unfunded liability, the City's contribution would only be \$4.5 million. So, that's point one. So, that's the required contribution that we have for the -- annually. So, as far as pensions, we have - - I don't know the year, but several years ago, we added the opportunity for employees to opt into either the pension plan or a 401 plan, so we do have the option to -- for employees to choose when they come in. The pension system is an item that is a negotiable item. It's a negotiating item. It's not something, as I understand it, that we can just remove. We have to negotiate. It's a benefit provided to employees. And so, it's something that is a negotiated item in the union contracts. What other questions? Because I kind of got caught up in the (INAUDIBLE).

City Manager Iglesias: And let me say that -- and let me...

Mayor Lago: Can you go into the 13th check?

Finance Director Gomez: Yes. Sorry, okay, yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Let me just say, Mayor, I believe the only city that doesn't have a pension plan for police and fire is Jacksonville.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: And they're having issues now.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Finance Director Gomez: Right, so -- okay, so yes, the required contribution is 20 million -- \$21 million roughly. So, we paid -- since 2000 -- I want to say 2015-ish, we paid an additional payment every year in order to make sure that we reduce the -- so the pension system is based on a -- it used to be a 30-year amortization. We -- the City and the City Pension Board reduced that amortization to 20-year amortization so as -- so that we can get things paid up quicker. The City did, back in 2019, passed a resolution to say we want to fund our unfunded liability quicker than the 20-year amortization or the then 30-year amortization. So, we ended up starting to send extra payments to the pension system. And so, this -- and bear with me as I'm opening up. This past year, we did make an extra payment -- hold on, I just want to get to the extra -- of \$7.6 million. So, on top of the \$21 million required contribution -- hold on, let me go to historic -- on top -- \$7.6 million. So, since 2015, we have paid an additional \$36.7 million into the pension system in order to pay down that unfunded liability. And that has shown success, right? So, we've been able to cut down the last -- the -- this -- at the last Pension Board meeting, the actuary told us that we're at about 10 and a half to 11 years we'll be fully funded if things continue to go the way they're going.

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you a question...

Finance Director Gomez: Sure.

Mayor Lago: Madam Director? And this is something -- I love the fact that we're having this conversation, it's great. And I'm happy that the Mayor's here and also that the police union is here. How much are we going to put additional? If we put 7.6 last year, what are we planning budgeting this year to put?

Finance Director Gomez: Yeah, so we're not done with the budget yet but...

Mayor Lago: What are we talking?

Finance Director Gomez: Approximately I would say it's probably going to be about \$8.6 million.

Mayor Lago: All right, so let's talk about that. So, the \$8.6 million, this Commission, this Commission -- well, previous Commissions, under the leadership of Mayor Valdes-Fauli, Mayor Cason, said we want to pay down the pension so that in 15, 20 years, when you're mayor, you're mayor, she's mayor, you're mayor, whoever's mayor, whoever decides to lead the City can have 20 plus million dollars, 26 million dollars of money to address Brett Gillis' issues, to address sidewalks, to address any issue that you want to address. Imagine having \$26 million a year right now in your pocket. We could have it right now if we didn't have an unfunded liability. So, this Commission, during the budget, can look over to the Manager and to the Finance Director and say, we don't want to pay those \$8.6 million. I want to put it into historic, I want to put it into sidewalks, I want to put it into traffic calming. And we can just take a different route, which is perfectly fine. I will be voting against that.

Finance Director Gomez: I would recommend against it as well.

Mayor Lago: Because -- but I will be voting against it, but let me tell you -- let me tell you what -- we can address issues right now that are tangible, that are viable, that you can see, a sidewalk, a historic building get fixed, a traffic calming, or we can address issues like an unfunded liability to our police and fire and to our general employees, which are basically unseen. They're nebulous, they're out there, no one knows. It's just an unfunded liability. It's on a piece of paper. That's the only way you can tell somebody. Hey, look, look at this problem that we're remediating, that we're addressing. We've taken our unfunded liability from 51 percent to almost 80 percent. How did we do it? By spending close to \$36 million, and including the eight and a half, we're going to be nearing \$50 million of additional money that this City spent while I've been in office that I could've used to address issues in the community that are tangible, that are tangible things right in front of you. This is not tangible, but it's important, it's critical. Why is it critical? And I'll tell you why it's critical. Just like we could take our \$50 million reserve, which was done under the leadership of Raul Valdes-Fauli and Jim Cason, we could say, we don't want \$50 million in reserve. Mr. Manager, take \$25 million from that and fix the issues that Mr. Gillis is saying, or address the \$10 million in backlog for sidewalks that is so important to Commissioner Fernandez and myself and everyone in this Commission. Let's just pay it. Let's just get it done. But you know what's going to happen? Your triple-triple bond rating is going to go away. And right now, through the leadership of the Manager and his staff and our esteemed director, we're one of three cities in the state of Florida that have a triple-triple bond rating. How did we do that? By making sacrifices, sacrifices that are not sexy, they're not beautiful, they're not tangible. They're not -- you can't play in that park. You can't touch that historic building, but you have \$50 million in the coffers, untouchable. You have a triple-triple bond rating and you're spending \$8.6 million this year on paying down this unfunded liability. Those are things that while not sexy, set the City apart and that is good leadership. That is what being a fiscally sound fiduciary on behalf of a community is, sometimes having to make a tough decision and not being able to finish a project or get started on a project because you don't want to take away from the finances of the city. Those are the tough decisions that I'm super excited about having a new Commission here who's going to help us find the money, find the money to address all the problems that we have. Because the

only way that I've been able to find it is by going to Tallahassee the last three years, or an option that I think will make my Finance Director pass out, but she's willing to do it, is raising taxes.

City Manager Iglesias: And Mayor, if I may say, that 45 to \$50 million allows us to take care of two small hurricanes or one large hurricane.

Mayor Lago: No, but if I interrupt...

City Manager Iglesias: FEMA does not give that money upfront.

Mayor Lago: If I may interrupt you.

City Manager Iglesias: We have to pay for it upfront.

Mayor Lago: If I may interrupt you, and I apologize. I take a lot of pleasure in this because there's a lot of things -- and I'm happy we have our old ACM here also who can attest to it. When we're sitting in a room and every other city is having a major problem because they can't get companies to come and move debris, not Coral Gables, not Coral Gables. Why? Because we're paying, and we're paying top dollar to clean streets, to cut down trees, to mulch, and to get rid of products. While other cities are waiting months and months and months and months, not us. We have companies that are ready to move forward because we're paying. How many years did we wait, Madam Finance Director, to get reimbursed from the State so that we could make whole our un -- our -- excuse me, our reserves? Because we used that money for the hurricane, correct?

Finance Director Gomez: Right.

Mayor Lago: So, how much -- how many years did we wait?

Finance Director Gomez: So, we're still waiting on about a million dollars, a million and a quarter.

Mayor Lago: A million and a quarter. But we could always use that money to address issues here of infrastructure and historic preservation and sidewalks and traffic calming. Again, it's a delicate balance. It's a delicate balance.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, if I just add...

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Vice Mayor Anderson: When we went to Tallahassee, one of the strong points that we had in being able to bring back more money...

Mayor Lago: Good point.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Is that we had been fiscally responsible.

Mayor Lago: Great point.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That we have been paying down in advance into our pension, that we have the reserves that we have. So, if you add up the money that we brought back because of our fiscal responsibility, I think you'll see that there's a plus in the side of the column that has given us additional monies to be able to do additional projects with. So, you can be pennywise and pound foolish, is the saying, or you can do it responsibly and fiscally responsibly for all the residents in the future.

Commissioner Menendez: If I may, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Of course, please.

Commissioner Menendez: Lately, I've heard comments, you know -- and I give kudos to my colleagues and staff who's gone to Tallahassee and Washington over the years. And -- but I've heard comments in the community that perhaps they don't understand the importance of doing that. They sort of throw political statements, jabs that are, I think, out of line because it's very simple. The County has more money than the City. The State has more money than the County and the City. The federal government has more money than the State, County, and City put together. So, when we're dealing with projects, and yesterday at the town hall meeting, septic to sewer came up, and the price tag that was thrown out in Tallahassee was \$350 million. So, to get \$350 million, most likely will require State funds and federal funds to get to that number. So, these trips or these efforts aren't political junkets. They're true missions to grab large dollars that are not available to us, and that's the hierarchy. When I worked -- when I was involved with the City of Miami, they went to Tallahassee because they were having some serious pension issues. And when the Tallahassee -- the State Legislature dug deep into the mismanagement, they basically laughed, like go away, you've mismanaged your funds. City of Coral Gables is not in that situation. As Commissioner Anderson said and the Mayor said, when up there, they were surprised how fiscally sound and well managed the funds are here compared to other cities in South Florida. And sometimes it's a stigma...

Mayor Lago: Yep.

Commissioner Menendez: Because they want to help the cities that are mismanaged. And he goes, well, you all have your house in order. You don't need our help. But the reality is the price tags on major projects, the price tags are pretty high. So, everything the Commission does, and I'm looking forward, like the Mayor said, Commissioner Castro, Commissioner Fernandez, to help us delve deeper into the state and federal opportunities. It's all an effort to help the City, but nothing is wasted, nothing is misspent, and our energies and our time are clearly for the residents, not for us, but it takes time, it takes effort, and it takes unity.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: And Madam Finance Director, would it be possible to prepare maybe -- the Mayor was talking a little bit about the timeline of our pension fund. Would it be possible to prepare a timeline that we can share with residents on the history of our pension fund, how we've gotten to where we are today, and our plan for the future?

Finance Director Gomez: So, yeah, a lot of that information is available on the retirement website under the actuarial valuation report that is done every year and is updated. They have schedules that show the losses and investments. They show the contributions.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, I'm not saying so much that, but it's more of, you know, this is -- these are the steps that maybe the Commission has taken in the past that have gotten our pension fund to where it is today.

Finance Director Gomez: Oh, to the steps in improving the payments, I guess.

Commissioner Fernandez: Improving, and the ones that actually put us in this situation as well.

Mayor Lago: Well, can I --? May I add something to that, just to give you a little clarity on that?

Finance Director Gomez: Sure.

Mayor Lago: This is broken down by year, and it shows the pension payments. I sent -- with my colleagues on the Commission before you got inaugurated, I sent a memo, and we had a conversation about having a Sunshine meeting after you've had your residents' first Sunshine meeting. And that is something that I think would be great for us because we can have this conversation and talk about anything.

Commissioner Fernandez: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Talk about everything, and the residents can come and talk.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I believe we do have a date for that...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Commissioner Fernandez: Which is next Monday.

Mayor Lago: Yes, and I said -- the residents can come and talk, and we can talk about any issue you want to talk about, any issue. And then these are -- this will be -- this, in my opinion, will be the foundation to how the City spends their money. Do we abandon sidewalks, or do we add less, or do we add more? That's just an example. I'm just using that as an example. Do we add more historic? Do we add less? I want to show you -- I want to show you, through the Finance Director and the Manager, the reports that we get that are online, that are there, that you can see where every single dollar is, where you can see that this year X amount of money came up because the property value increases. Where did it go? 33 percent went to the School Board, 30 percent went to Miami-Dade County, X amount went to state and federal. What is the City left with? Okay, this is what the City's left with. All right, but we had a 37 percent increase in our insurance, almost to the tune of \$2 million, so that chipped away at that. Then we had general employees raises that we gave to them after our multiyear review in regards to other cities and what they're paying, and what are we left with, and what are we going to use that money with? And it's all there and transparent. And then the Commission can make a decision on how they want to spend the money and they can reallocate the resources. That is something that I will -- that's the purpose of why I called the Sunshine meeting, to better understand what your priorities and what your priorities are, move forward and help us find the money to address what Mr. Gillis wants. Because we had to be very creative with the Manager. We had to be very creative and with the Finance Director on how we can use Art in Public Places funds to do the White Way Lights. And if you know, and you've seen me, I'm an art lover, and I didn't want to use that money, as the Finance Director will tell

you, but I went against my own interests to make sure that we can deliver on the White Way Lights because I'm tired of promising the White Way Lights, and it's an embarrassment when you look at the White Way Lights. And Karelia Carbonell wouldn't stop calling me, okay, which I love to death, by the way.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, yeah, and she was a driving force...

Mayor Lago: She was a driving force.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Behind it as well as the Historic Preservation Association.

Mayor Lago: Yes, yes, very well.

Vice Mayor Anderson: It's wonderful that these gems were preserved. I wish money grew on trees, but it doesn't but...

Mayor Lago: Yes, and Karelia and the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables have pushed to a level that is remarkable. Do we have anybody else, Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, we do.

Mayor Lago: All right, then I'm sorry. I thought we were done, I apologize.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ah, there she is.

Commissioner Menendez: Telepathic.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Karelia, good afternoon.

Karelia Carbonell: Yes, good afternoon. And I am really pleased that we, the Historic Preservation Association, finally got its well-deserved recognition, especially with the White Way Lights. That has been this organization's signature project for many, many years. It started with Mayor Cason, and of course, Mayor Lago was instrumental in the funding. So, I just wanted to correct that record, because it seems that other organizations get the recognition, and I understand they're older and have been around. But HPACG should always be at the top of the list here in Coral Gables. We are the Coral Gable Historic Preservation Association. This morning, I understand from other people that HPACG was not recognized as part of National Preservation Month, which is, again, a lack of recognition. So, I hope that could be corrected as well. It's a full month. So, I'm hoping that, you know, next time or the next Commission meeting, that there is a formal recognition of our organization. The other -- and really, I wanted -- that's my impetus for the call because I wanted to put the record straight. As far as -- I did hear some other issues with the Gondola building and the Fink Studio. The Gondola building, going back to 2018, was in disrepair. That's, you know, many years ago, that's five years ago. The City actually put aside money and never acted on it, so that's one point. The other point is the Fink Studio. The Fink Studio has or had all the original furnishings. And I hear the City Manager saying that it needs to be furnished. Now, where are the original furnishings? And I think that needs to come back. We need to make sure that those are properly restored. And so, again, I urge that this is taken into account. The Fink Studio is wonderful. You know, we're all pleased that it's there and it's being renovated. It won an award. So, kudos to everybody that has worked on it, but we do need to restore it appropriately in terms of the original furnishings. And I hope that that is coming back. And I am -- I have been tracking it, and I know that I've been in communication with Sarah and, of course, Warren has left. But, you know, we're all watching. So, I really wanted to make sure that those things are on record. So, thank you for listening. Take care, bye-bye.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Ed Santamaria.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Santamaria, good afternoon.

Ed Santamaria: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission. To the newly elected, welcome aboard.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mr. Santamaria: Mr. Manager, Mr. Clerk, Ms. City Attorney. I'm here to speak to you as a -- not only a resident of the City of Coral Gables for close to 20 years, but also a five-year City employee. During those five years, I reported directly to the Manager, Mr. Iglesias. I can tell you that it's no secret that the Manager and I had departed on a number of issues, managerial issues, which is why I'm no longer here at the City, and I haven't been here for over a year, almost two years in September. I've been living the role of a recovering public servant ever since then. I'd like to say that this city is very well run. From everything that I have seen, having worked here, and having lived here, I can tell you that this is a very, very well run city. As far as Mr. Manager is concerned, I can tell you that it's my experience that Mr. Iglesias is always looking out for the best interests of the City. Now, you may all disagree, and some of the folks here would disagree perhaps on those interests, whether they are the best interests or not. But I can tell you that Mr. Iglesias makes decisions based on a lot of information that not all of us on the outside are privy to. That's also exemplified by the fact that I think that the new members do not have all the information yet. So, in my opinion, it would be a very, very rash move to reset the system without having gotten in there and really having done a full evaluation of the system and how it functions and understanding some of the issues and challenges that present itself in running a city like this at a high level. I'm happy to be a resource to each and every one of you can reach out to me, I'm easily found. And I

would like to see the City of Coral Gables stay as it is, the best city in Miami-Dade County and probably the state of Florida, in my opinion. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Mr. ACM, thank you very much for being here. You're a gentleman, I appreciate that. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Christopher Challenger.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Challenger, good afternoon.

Christopher Challenger: Hi, Christopher Challenger, Coral Gables Fraternal Order of Police President. I wasn't going to say anything, and I'm not here to say whether the City Manager should stay or go, that's not my decision. But I do hear a lot of back patting for contributions towards retirement and 13th payments, but it never comes back to the employees. Maybe most people don't know that our employees contribute triple what other employees contribute to the pension. It's not a question about morale in our police department. It's a problem. It's not a question about morale in other areas of the department because it's a problem. The City -- although I love Coral Gables -- they didn't decide to do a compensation study for the employees because they thought it was a good idea. They did it because they were having a difficult time keeping people here. Our motor pool is in shambles. There's nobody there. And you can say whatever you want, that's the way it is. Our Communications Division, it's difficult to retain dispatchers. And I know it's a widespread problem, but it's bigger than any resident knows. The morale in the Police Department is at an all-time low. And I know people probably don't want me to say, and you want to sweep it under the carpet, but there are many officers that have applied to other agencies. It's not a joke, it's not a ploy because it's contract negotiation. It's a fact. Now, we can hide ourselves and talk about water towers and how that's crumbling. The employees in the City have been neglected as well. So, I just want to say, at least if you're going to pat yourself on the back for doing the additional 13th check, give the employees a little bit of credit for contributing triple what other places are. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam, will you do me a favor? Will you please, Madam Director, explain and -- the response in regards to the triple?

Commissioner Castro: Could we put something on the next -- on the next agenda? I'm sorry. Could we put the Evergreen Solutions Compensation Study done February 24th...

City Clerk Urquia: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: 2023 up for discussion? Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Madam Director.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: Good afternoon, Commissioners and Mayor. So, the City employees contribute -- the police officers and firefighters contribute 10 percent into the pension plan. That is the average employee contribution when it comes to other local defined benefit plans. Now, when you compare yourselves to the FRS, FRS employees do only contribute 3 percent. But most other defined benefit plans that are similar to ours usually contribute anywhere between 9, 10, 11 percent.

Mayor Lago: How much do the general employees contribute?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: General employees currently covered by the Teamsters are 13 percent and their benefits are lower.

Mayor Lago: So, they contribute more than the police.

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: They do.

Mayor Lago: Okay. And at one point, how much -- what was the highest since I've been here that they were contributing, the general employees?

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: At one point, I think it was in 2016 and '15, they contributed close to 22 percent.

Mayor Lago: 22 percent, and we took -- we came back, and we pushed that back to make sure we didn't...

Human Resources Director Elejabarrieta: We capped the cost sharing provision.

Mayor Lago: We capped -- okay. So, let me tell you what everybody's seeing here right now. And I want to -- I want you to understand. What you're seeing here is negotiations that should happen amongst the Commission, not on the floor of the Commission meeting. So, that is grandstanding at its best in an effort to try to effectuate change. What we're going to do -- and this is the exciting thing about this new Commission -- is we're going to sit down and you, along with our attorneys and our City Manager, are going to put all the cards on the table and this Commission is going to have to make a decision. And they're going to say, do we cut from here to raise salaries? How much are we raising salaries? What is the good amount? How does that compare to other municipalities? You will show them the charts and you will see where we fall amongst all the other municipalities in reference to the benefits that we offer. And then if my colleagues in the Commission would like to pay more, then we can cut back on the \$8.5 million that we're providing to pay down the pension, which is shoring up. And they make it seem as if that \$8.5 million is not something of importance, it is. It's shoring up their retirement, so when they leave the City, we're in fiscally sound footing to ensure that they can go and enjoy their retirement after years of hard work on behalf of the City. I'm retiring without a pension. I don't have a pension. Most of us are in 401ks, which are not defined benefits, they're defined contributions. We need to understand that. Our pensions go up and down with the market. These are pensions that are given for life, and then they're given to their spouse in most cases. So, we

need to be understanding that this is the type of negotiation that should not be happening. This negotiation should be happening behind closed doors with our team, which you run, and you do a great job, our City Manager, and we should have that conversation. No one is going to intimidate me, no union, to make a decision that I believe is not in the best interest of the City. All we do is -- instead of slapping backs, all we do is thank the police, the firefighters, and the general employees for their work. But we have to make decisions. If you want to pay more, you got to cut somewhere, or you can raise taxes. Those are the options that we have. They're very, very simple, very, very clear. But we're paying \$8.6 million. When I started here on the Commission, we paid \$500,000. Every year we've been increasing to make sure that we can pay for an unfunded liability that nobody on this Commission, the Manager, no employee is responsible for because it happened over a decade ago, well over a decade ago, but we're paying for those broken plates. And I will not, I will not -- my colleagues may feel differently -- take the easy route. What is the easy route? Don't put \$8.6 million into the pension. Use it on salaries. Take the \$50 million from the reserve that took us so many years to build up and just take \$30 million of it and spend it on historic preservation or sidewalks. No, that's why we budget over a time period, and we see if we can get matching funds, grants, Tallahassee, and different things. So, these are things that I'm excited about, that we're going to talk about in negotiations, and we're going to make the decision as a Commission, and I look forward to that.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I think one of the things that we've heard over the last few months, and quite frankly, I've heard for years is the lack of transparency that we've had in this process. And I think having this conversation here is not grandstanding. It is an opportunity for residents to hear exactly what's going on behind the scenes. And I think that's one of the biggest arguments against the City Manager. How many things have gone on behind the scenes, behind closed doors, and hiding from the residents of the City of Coral Gables who we're here to represent. None of us are here to represent the interests of the City Manager. He may be a great person. I'm sure that he is. I have -- I have nothing to say about him as a person, nothing to say about him as a structural engineer. I've heard a lot of great things about him as a structural engineer. However, the residents

of the City of Coral Gables have made one thing evidently clear. They want to be the priority and they want a city manager that makes them the priority. And we don't have that in Peter Iglesias.

Mayor Lago: So, let me respond to you on that, okay? And I welcome -- please, I welcome that you speak to other city attorneys, city managers, and other elected officials throughout the community, and ask them whether you conduct union negotiations in public or whether you conduct them in the privacy of your negotiation team and your Commission. That is -- these are called negotiations for a reason. We proffer what the City's willing to do in private and they proffer back to us, and we come to an agreement. Please don't forget that we didn't go into an impasse. The unions went to an impasse. That's not us. We are not willing to accept currently where we stand, and we will find a happy medium. We came to an -- we came to -- before you came on the Commission, we came to an agreement with the employees. The last Commission before -- the last Commission meeting before you got on, we came to an agreement with the employees, and we're looking at what's been proffered by the firefighters and the police, and we'll come to an understanding. But I will not mortgage the City's future just to say that I got a union contract done. That's not the way it works because we have been very careful. The Manager has nothing to do with that. The union -- the people who are responsible are sitting up here, the Commissioners. You will be making the decision whether you accept what the Finance Director tells you, which she will tell you very clearly. If you accept what they're offering, this is the cost. And we need to cut from -- we need to find X and Y millions to ensure that we can pay for these employees. And you're going to make that decision. And that is, the buck is going to stop with the Commission. The Manager works at the will, but we do not have public -- I don't know if you want to start having public negotiating. We will be the first city in the state of Florida to do that. But we do not share our negotiations with anyone except for the Commission or our consultants. That is just the way that every city does it, and it's called negotiations for a reason.

Commissioner Fernandez: It's not about negotiations. I mean, your comment was that the president of the union was grandstanding and trying to negotiate here. It's not about a negotiation. I think this -- this brought about for residents a conversation where we heard his side, and we heard

the City's side. Residents can now decide whether the union is correct, or the City is correct. And I think that's where we need to start moving. The direction we need to start moving in is having an open process of conversation. Not saying the negotiation is going to be held here in the dais and we're going to have a negotiation in public because I don't think it's fair to them, I don't think it's fair to the residents, and I don't think it's fair to the City. But we do have to have an open process where residents are aware of how these decisions are being made and what the basis for these decisions is.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so I will respond to you. Commissioner, I adopted the legislation that requires one hour of open communication during every Commission meeting. I have office hours, which Mr. Challenger was there for about an hour and a half two weeks ago, correct, sir? You spent about an hour and a half in my office where we had a very, very interesting conversation in regards to our -- my position and his position in regards to the union. We have town hall meetings. You had your first town hall meeting. I'm having one next week. I attended your town hall meeting.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: They come -- not please, it was great. It was incredibly attended. You did a great job. Mr. Challenger has been to my town hall meeting. Mr. Challenger has asked me questions in front of residents. We are transparent. Everything here -- Mr. Challenger spoke at two Commission meetings ago and our chief of police responded. There's nothing to hide, there's nothing to -- there's nothing. We have very clear and candid conversations. The interesting thing about it is that now when we have a Commission that is new, I'm excited to see what is the change and where could we get the finances to be able to address the concerns across the board. You will make a decision with -- in regards to the police and the fire because the City residents, the City employees that has already been put to bed for several years, correct, Mr. Manager?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: We already have a union negotiation that was taken care of by the previous Commission in regards to our general employees, so that's already done. We took care of that. Now, with your guidance, you will tell us where we are going to cut or where we're going to find the revenue to address what the police and the firefighters want. And that is something that, once we do it, I'm -- I would love to be able to stand up here and say, Mr. Fernandez, please tell us how we're able to come to an accord and at what expense and at what cost in reference to what they want and how are we able to bridge the gap. We can do that transparently, we can do that here, but this is about money. Don't fool yourself. This is about money because all our facilities are brand new. We have three brand-new fire stations and Public Safety Building. We're building a fourth fire station. We offer the best equipment. We offer great amenities here in the city. And we have great, great residents, and they're dealing with people in this community that are truly a pleasure. Do they put their life on the line every single day? 110 percent. And we're blessed to have them here. But I'm looking forward to the resolution that this Commission will put forward. I'm excited.

Commissioner Castro: I agree 100 percent. Negotiation should not be done here. However, we do need to improve our communication skills because a lot of the decisions that we're doing when we're negotiating not here, residents are not understanding. And yes, we have one hour of comments, but how can you comment on a subject that you don't know about? Because we're not communicating effectively with our residents. I think that's one of the concerns -- and that's why I want to really go over the compensation study so that residents really know what's happening.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm just going to add from, you know, from my experience recently -- well, a couple months ago, we had an executive session with the City Attorney's Office and counsel. And at that time, we were briefed as to where the negotiations were. And we, as members of the Commission, were -- we gave guidance to the negotiations team as to what direction we felt. But that was in a situation that you don't want to obviously let the other side know what you're thinking.

City Attorney Suárez: So, I just -- Mayor, if I may. I just want to add that...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

City Attorney Suárez: The discussions in those executive sessions between the Manager and the Commission are closed to the public...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

City Attorney Suárez: And they are exempt from the Sunshine Law. Also, all the work product that's developed and all of that, that is all also confidential. So, it's...

Mayor Lago: And Madam City Attorney...

City Attorney Suárez: It cannot be disclosed.

Mayor Lago: And Madam City Attorney, if I may, just for the -- you know, for my two colleagues in the Commission, does any other city that you know of do it any differently?

City Attorney Suárez: They cannot pursuant to state law.

Mayor Lago: I love it. Okay, perfect. That answers that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, and this is very -- and sorry Mayor, I jumped in. This is very similar to what attorneys do during mediation. Mediator sits at the middle of the table. It's a confidential proceeding on negotiations back and forth. With regard to the compensation study and the raises that were just given to the Teamsters, a lot of that input, voicing concern for those employees came from residents, and we pushed it forward.

Mayor Lago: Yep.

City Attorney Suárez: I just want to clarify though, the meetings between the -- the negotiation meetings between the Manager or between the City and the union, that is open to the public. So, it's noticed and it's open to the public.

Commissioner Menendez: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk, one thing that came up during this conversation, I'd like to add to the next agenda, a discussion on executive benefits, please.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, sir.

Mayor Lago: Do we have any other public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, then we will close the public comment. Mr. Fernandez, this is -- Commissioner Fernandez, this is your item. How would you like to proceed?

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, I had prepared remarks, but I decided not to use them. I think we've heard from a lot of members of this community today who have different opinions about the City Manager and his ability to run the City. I do take offense to the folks who said that I don't know what it's like to work with the City Manager and that I have no experience in working with the City Manager. Because since he became city manager, I've had to deal with the City Manager on numerous occasions. And I think Mr. Martucci said it well. This is not the City of Miami. This is the City of Coral Gables. And we can start with a whole laundry list of reasons why we

should terminate the City Manager. But I think it comes down to one basic reason. The residents have been clear they want a change in direction in the City and that can only be accomplished with a new city manager at the helm. And the reason I say that we need a city manager who is here to listen to the members of the Commission and to the new members of the Commission. Had a two and a half hour meeting with the Manager, the City Attorney was present, and I got barked back at over the issues that I was bringing up. To me, that was unacceptable, you know. We are the ones who represent the residents. The City Manager was not elected by any residents. He was elected by five members of the Commission who appointed him, but we are the ones that answer back to the residents and who are held responsible for the management of this city. So, that is the reason I put this on discussion, and I'll open it up to my colleagues to hear your comments.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: When I review qualities of an individual to do a job, I reflect upon many different things. And Commissioner Fernandez, you know, the change of direction for the City, the Manager follows our direction. I can agree to disagree with my colleagues, and I have disagreed on some very important issues, including the design of the Mobility Hub. We disagreed. I was outvoted. I respect the vote. We move forward. The City Manager follows our direction and has that choice. I've served in many different functions as an attorney. One of those was as a quasi-trustee on behalf of a client that had some issues with the United States government. The United States government trusted me to make some very important decisions during that job. I had to take over a business and run it turnkey. I had to decide which employees stayed, and which ones were essential, and which ones had to go. I had to look at the quality of the individual and how essential they were to running the operations and look at the different qualifications of that individual. Factors that warrant firing of an individual usually have to do with malfeasance at a high level, okay. I was dealing with an organization where some of those employees were taking cash under the table. That's a high violation. There were some very essential employees that were

necessary to be able to sell that business as a turnkey operation. Those were warranted to keep. We've had difficult times and this city manager has been at the helm of the COVID disasters that we had, kept this city running without losing a single employee, without raising, you know, taxes and maintaining the level of service that our residents expected. I can't say that for other cities. We have a reserve, despite having those difficult times, that other cities wish they had. And we're very proud of it, and we're able to utilize it in Tallahassee to say, don't punish us because we're wise in the way we reserve our funds. Just because residents might be happy, not happy, or happy about something is not the only factor that has to be considered. Because we're entrusted to run this city on behalf of the residents in the best manner possible to have a continuity of services. In my experience, the City Manager, despite disagreements on issues, is an honest man, is a trustworthy man. And for this operation to be able to continue on, you don't want to take away the captain of the ship without having a properly trained individual to take up the helm. You might have disagreements. We might get upset. We might not agree on many things. But this is not an Alice in Wonderland movie where you just take off the head of the individual that you need to run your city. What are the criteria that you would think is appropriate for firing?

Commissioner Fernandez: Are you asking?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah, I'm asking.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, again, I go back to, we need a leader who is willing to listen to the residents and to the Commission. And I explained, I had a two and a half hour meeting with the Manager, and that wasn't the response I got. A city manager that talks down to a member of the Commission, that's unacceptable. It is completely unacceptable. We need somebody at the helm who's willing to listen to residents. He just went to the Planning and Zoning Board to ask for our parking lots, surface parking lots, to be increased to MX3, and he blamed the Commission. The Commission never gave him that directive, unless somebody up here met with him and gave him that directive, which I don't believe we did.

Vice Mayor Anderson: There hasn't been a vote taken here...

Commissioner Fernandez: So...

Vice Mayor Anderson: On that (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Fernandez: But he went to the Planning and Zoning Board, and he asked the Planning and Zoning Board to increase the height, the one biggest concern that residents in this City have. So, he's actively advocating against the interests of the residents who he represents.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, well, I don't hear that he's not an honest man, and I don't hear that he...

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Manager...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Not doing his job right.

Mayor Lago: Would you like to respond to Commissioner Fernandez's comments about the surface parking lot issue?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor. The City Commission, on Resolution 2021-339, on November 9th of '21, asked me to evaluate site development options for that site.

Mayor Lago: Yes, sir.

City Manager Iglesias: That site is currently MX1 against Le Jeune, MX2 in the back. The site specifics are MX3. There's also the Zane Friedman Miracle Mile District, which provides for a lower height on Miracle Mile and a higher height behind Miracle Mile. This has been going on for almost 20 years. In addition to that, the parking at Miracle Mile -- the height of Miracle Mile

was reduced to 50 feet and no parking allowed. It all had to be remote parking. In addition to that, there's a difference between -- the MX2 provides for 97 feet and the MX3 provides for 190.5 feet. For instance, the Mobility Hub would be 116 feet, so it would be MX3. However, it's a far cry from 190. So, when you...

Mayor Lago: And the Code allows currently 190, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: 190.5.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. So, most of the area behind Miracle Mile is MX3. So zoning is complicated. By the way, the public -- the P and Z is a recommending board. It's not a change in zoning. It's a recommendation in accordance with the Commissioners' ask to evaluate site development options. So, if we went to 100 feet, not 97, we'd have to be at MX3. So, if we went slightly above 97 feet, as what's been talked about for almost 20 years, through the -- through that downtown overlay or Miracle Mile overlay, we would have to go to the MX3 because there's nothing in between. Nothing -- there's nothing between, and maybe we should look at MX2.5, something in between MX2 and MX3. So...

Mayor Lago: Have you provided -- have you provided our new colleagues with that resolution that came directly from the Commission?

City Manager Iglesias: I have talked about this.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I don't think my question revolves around that resolution. The resolution was to explore development options, whether it was what is currently on the site with the current owner of the former LaSalle site, whatever it was, nowhere did we say increase the height. The Commission did not instruct you to increase the height. And again, Mr. Manager,

with all due respect, the residents' biggest concern in the City is our overdevelopment and our increasing the height. When you and I had this conversation in my office, your response to me, what do you think the best use of that site is? That's up to the residents. That's not up to you to make that decision to increase the height to MX3. Whether it's 196, 120, 100, it doesn't really matter to me. You are working against the interest of residents.

City Manager Iglesias: I don't believe so, Commissioner.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: That is currently a surface parking lot. The Commission asked me to evaluate -- and by the way, we own multiple properties there, so that property can only be developed, one, by a vote of the City Commission, and can only be rezoned by a vote of the City Commission, so I did not rezone anything. That is -- that is not -- that is not correct.

Commissioner Fernandez: You requested an increase in height.

City Manager Iglesias: I asked for a -- I asked for an opinion of the Planning and Zoning Board. The Planning and Zoning Board is a recommending board. It is not the City Commission. It's a recommending board. In addition to that, prior commissions have always envisioned a lower Miracle Mile and a higher building in the back. The prior Commission did that by removing parking from Miracle Mile, which was a huge issue, creating a remote parking on the Mile and limiting the Mile to 50 feet. The Mile is a 120-foot right-of-way, and it's limited to 50 feet. So, this is what the -- this is what has been envisioned for almost 20 years. I asked for a recommendation. The P and Z Board is a recommendation, and I am here to evaluate all options for the City Commission and make a recommendation. And that is an option. And it's an option that's been around for almost two decades.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

Commissioner Fernandez: And the option -- and what we're saying here is, you're saying because Miracle Mile's 50 feet, we have to increase the height. We are increasing the height at MX2, are we not?

City Manager Iglesias: Almost -- almost all of Miracle Mile is MX3 behind, almost all of Miracle Mile.

Commissioner Fernandez: But you're encroaching closer to residential.

City Manager Iglesias: As I explained -- as I explained to you, okay -- and I know -- I realize that zoning is messy. We were limited 97. So, if you want to go 100 feet, just 3 feet, you have to go to MX3.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner...

City Manager Iglesias: So, I explained to you also, maybe an MX2.5 might be more in order in areas where we don't want to go to 190. But the City Commission asked me to evaluate options, and that's exactly what I did, and the City Commission has to approve all those options from the project itself, which the developer cannot do without the City through the zoning itself.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, if I may. I was the mayor when this resolution was proffered and put together. I know what the intent was, and I know what the intent of the Commission was. The Manager was following our orders to bring back a project that could be voted on the Commission. This is a City-owned parking lot at the end of the day. This is not a private entity that's being upzoned. This is a City-owned parking lot.

Commissioner Fernandez: But they are benefiting. The private owners of Lot 1 and Lot 3...

Mayor Lago: No one is...

Commissioner Fernandez: Are benefiting from the increase in height.

Mayor Lago: This is what I'm trying to explain. And this is where now, as a real insider, you get to figure it out. You get to see it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I take offense to that.

Mayor Lago: You get...

Commissioner Fernandez: I think you should treat me with a little more respect.

Mayor Lago: You get to understand it now and you get to see it. The buck stops with the Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez: Correct.

Mayor Lago: And you are the one that's going to make the decision here whether we provide somebody with an additional floor in -- in turn for a park, whether we allow for more density, more intensity, whether we allow for more FAR, whether we allow TDRs. Now is the opportunity to see that. This was the will of the Commission in a resolution that was proffered here. It says provide recommendations to the City Commission regarding the site's potential for development. That's what we were looking at. We were looking for opportunities to find new revenue streams, just to listen and understand what was being proffered. It doesn't mean we have to accept it. Let me give you an example of that.

Commissioner Fernandez: But we talk about wasting...

Mayor Lago: Let me give you -- let me give an exam...

Commissioner Fernandez: We talk about wasting resources.

Mayor Lago: But let me give you an example. Let me give you an example, okay, which I always get pegged as the individual who is pro-development. It's very interesting. Remember the parking garages that were being -- the project that was being proposed by Allen Morris, which is a great developer, who's done great buildings here in the City, and Related? I was opposed to that building for two years. Certain colleagues on the Commission were in favor of it. It went forward against my will. I stood very firm for two years, just like I stood firm on not upzoning Miracle Mile. But colleagues of mine on the Commission moved it forward and it made it to the Commission floor, remember? And then we stopped it. And we stopped it, but we still -- we got rid of the parking, which was important, and we pegged it at 50 feet, which was, by the way, an upzoning because we allowed an additional floor. But we took away the opportunity for parking. So, against my own interests and against my own wants, the Commission moved forward because it's the will of the Commission to present an upzoning on Miracle Mile and a project that they spent millions of dollars, which would span from Le Jeune all the way to Ponce. And they came before the Commission, and it did not receive the proper support. I even voted against providing them -- granting them with the ability to have last look if the City ever did anything. I said that's not in the best interest of the City in my opinion. I voted against that. But that's not the Manager's will, that is the Commission's will. I would speak to the Manager, and we would have arguments, arguments, professional arguments about how could we do this. If you allow nine stories on Miracle Mile, it will ruin this jewel. Just like when I voted against Gable Station; came forward and it got the votes. Just like when I voted against the height on Agave. It came forward and it got the votes. So, sometimes there are things that come before the Commission that the Manager is moving forward that are the request of three elected officials. He's got to do -- he can't just say I'm not going to do something because Commissioner Fernandez wants it or because Mayor Lago wants it. He's got to listen to the Commission and the Commission wants to move forward on a project like the parking garages that were being proffered by the developer on Andalusia. Guess

what? It moved forward. And we had a lot of conversations about cantilevering structures, about the amount of FAR, is 6.0 too much. I won't accept that. How much parking is the City going to get? All those things. And that is an example of what you have here. It's not the Manager, it's the Commission. And now both of you are here, and you're going to provide your input, and you're going to say -- and you're going to win on certain things, and I'm going to lose. And that's okay because that's our democracy. That's the way it works. But don't -- don't -- please, I'm asking you, don't blame an individual. Don't blame an individual who is not responsible for moving forward an agenda that is set forth, a course that is set forth by the Commission. I'm going to give you some examples of where I have disagreed with this individual. And it ended up costing me a significant amount of money. But at the end of the day, he was right. On my house, I have a pool. I live on a corner lot. And I wanted to build a wall. And I tried to avoid building a wall and tried to do a picket fence. And I sat down with our Zoning Director. And our Zoning Director says, look, maybe we could do something, but it's just the Code is a little bit ambiguous. I went to meet with the Manager. And I told the Manager, look, a picket fence will cost me \$5,000 versus a wall will cost me \$60,000. Manager said, Vince, you have no other choice. You have to do the wall. Oh, can we get a way -- can we find a way around this? You know, some sort of variance. Vince, you're an elected official, build the wall. I built the wall. Let me give you the second example. When I met with the Manager and I was one of the first people in this community to put solar on their house -- six years ago, I think it was, Rhonda.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Miami-Dade County had a different standard for installation. I could have -- Miami-Dade standard had 90 penetrations for my brand-new roof. The Manager made me put 190 penetrations on my roof because he believed that it would be structurally more sound in regards to uplift for a hurricane. And guess what? He was right. Because when a hurricane came and we faced 100 miles an hour wind, I slept easy that day that nothing would have happened to my roof. Let me give you another example going even further. I'm an elected official, and this goes even further when he wasn't even in the City. I'm an elected official, a newly elected Commissioner,

and my background is in construction and design. I am working with my company doing a hospital project at Jackson. And I go and meet with the Manager when he was the Building Director of the City of Miami. And I told him, sir, we have some issues here with the project. I need an early start date. What will be your requirements in the City of Miami? He told me, look, we can provide an early start date. These are the parameters. Follow this. This gentleman looked at the plans in one moment and said, there's a problem with this building. I said, what is the problem? He said -- he looked at it, he goes, 35 years ago, there was a certain engineering firm -- and I don't want to mention the name -- who made some gross errors in regards to design, and this -- I have a feeling this may be one of the buildings. Go and please get me the microfilm. Stopped my project, stopped my project for two weeks, okay. Stopped my project for two weeks, and I came back with the microfilm. We sat down, and he goes, Vince, this is an issue. He did all the calculations himself, sat down with the structural engineer, made me hire a structural engineer to come in and verify, and guess what? He was right. This was a \$10 million project that cost my client, but guess what? Nobody died in the building. Because we were going to be putting significant load on that building, and who knows what would have happened. This is a just, honest man. This is a man that calls it black and white, balls and strikes. This is the way that you want to be judged one day, and that you will be judged one day. And I have had many disagreements with him, many arguments with him where I've come home and I've said, you know, Peter is just being difficult about this issue. I wish I could get it done. Why can't I get it done? Just like with Billy, just like with the City Attorney. There are going to be moments -- just like with Suramy Cabrera, just like with, you know, Ed Hudak. You're going to have those moments here. But when you are the elected official, you don't want to have 3-2. You want to have 5-0.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't think this is about 3-2 or 5-0.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well...

Commissioner Fernandez: This is about the will of residents, and that's the message I'm trying to get across. And everything you said makes perfect sense. He's a great structural engineer. We

can hire him back as a structural engineer. I have no problem doing that. I mean, that's basically what you're telling me. All these examples are about his work as a structural engineer.

Mayor Lago: I'm not...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll -- yeah, I'll...

Mayor Lago: The issue -- the issue...

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm sorry. I haven't even let you speak so...

Mayor Lago: The issue -- and I -- and by...

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm blocking you here.

Commissioner Menendez: I'm enjoying this.

Mayor Lago: And by the way -- by the way, Commissioner -- Commissioner, you're going on two weeks here, and I've been doing open door office hours for nine years. And you talk about residents first, every single time, every single time that I've had an issue here where we've had 15, 20, 30, 40 residents and I call a resident, he comes up to deal with it. Suramy comes up to deal with it. They address the issue. I think what ends up happening is that once you get a little bit more immersed in the issues here and having run several different companies with a lot of different employees, every time I've stepped into a leadership role, even when I've been moved into a project that has hundreds of employees working on it and the project is halfway through the process of completion, I don't make any changes until I have been fully immersed in the project to understand the ramifications of moving any piece. That is real leadership. And that is understanding -- and that is understanding -- that is understanding -- that is understanding how the hierarchy works and whether someone is really competent to lead.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't need anybody telling me how I should lead. It's really...

Mayor Lago: I'm not telling you.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, you -- you are.

Mayor Lago: I'm advising.

Commissioner Fernandez: And you've been telling us, Commissioner Castro and myself, the entire meeting, that we don't know, that we're not informed, and that we should get informed. I'm sorry, Mr. Mayor, you're completely wrong.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, I...

Commissioner Fernandez: We were elected as representatives of the residents. You can question whatever you want to question about me. There's no other resident other than Maria Cruz and Jackson "Rip" Holmes who have been at more Commission meetings over the last 10 years, every single meeting, following every single thing, doing public records requests, finding out what's going on behind the scenes, talking to members of staff, talking to residents. You questioning my being informed is an insult and I do not appreciate that. I expect a little more respect. I respect your opinion. You like the work that the City Manager is doing and that's fine. We can take a vote and you can vote in a different direction. And it isn't about getting 5-0 votes or 3-2 votes or 4-1 votes. It's about each of us representing the constituency that elected us. And the constituency that elected me has had similar experiences to the ones that I have had with the Manager. I mean, you yourself tried to assist with a situation on safety at Salvadore Park that I raised. You asked for the police chief to meet with me, and the Manager intervened and said, absolutely not, the meeting is not taking place. Ignoring -- I don't want -- I really don't want to hear from the Manager on this issue because if it's taken almost a year for him to address it, it's a little too late now.

Mayor Lago: Listen, I'm always -- I'm always open to listening. That's why we do what we do. I never shut anybody down. It can be a year later, two years later.

Commissioner Fernandez: We turned microphones off last Commission meeting, didn't we?

Mayor Lago: Last Commission meeting? No, I turned...

Commissioner Fernandez: When Maria Cruz came up to speak, the microphone was turned off because it wasn't convenient.

Mayor Lago: In 10 years, in 10 years of me being here, I've had an incident with one resident. And the resident has had the opportunity to speak today as much as they want, and they've been allowed to speak -- and by the way, even further, even further, you and that resident have been coming to my house for 10 years. How much more access do you want?

Commissioner Fernandez: So, you know -- you know how well I know the issues then.

Mayor Lago: So, listen...

Commissioner Fernandez: Directly from you...

Mayor Lago: But it's not -- but it's not...

Commissioner Fernandez: Your interactions.

Mayor Lago: But it's not that you don't have an interact -- it's not the issue. That's not the issue. The issue is a very simple one, that you have not interacted with the Manager the way that we've

interacted with him day to day. And certain things -- you don't have a firsthand account in regards to pensions and the budget. You don't...

Commissioner Fernandez: But we do have a strong number two. I think Commissioner Anderson was concerned about who could take over. Mr. Parjus has more experience in managing than the City Manager does.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well...

Commissioner Fernandez: He has controlled the -- or was number two in the County on the budget for eight years. I mean, as far as experience, we have somebody who can assume the role as an interim immediately and not skip a beat.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, I started this with my question about honesty, integrity, and grounds. I haven't heard that. I think you know where my vote sits on that. As far as -- as far as -- as far as the vote regarding Miracle Mile, I'm recused off that matter. That's going to be in your hands to call the balls and strikes on that one. And the Manager, I am certain, I am confident, will follow the will of the Commission. It is up to the new Commissioners to fulfill the will of the residents and give direction to the City Manager. He's always told me that he will follow whatever our direction is. I've found him to be very apolitical on these items. Yes, we may disagree. He is difficult, but that does come with someone that is highly skilled. I also have heard from the arborist that's moving the trees at various places. He's viewed as a very difficult individual. In fact, I'm viewed as a very difficult individual because I chastised him for not following -- the builder for not following certain protocols. But they also learned to respect me for that because the high standards that are required in this city. So, I'll pass the mic to the next individual.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Menendez: Well, I try not to be difficult, but I can't help it sometimes. Some of you who know me, I worked almost 13 years at the City of Miami as an Assistant City Manager - - Assistant City Attorney, Assistant to the City Manager, Intergovernmental Affairs Director. I wore many hats over many years. And in the last six years that I was with the City, when I left the City, someone says, you know what your great achievement is? I go, no, what is it? He goes, you worked for five city managers in a six-year period. And I thought about it, and they were right. And then I reflected, and I realized that that constant turnover -- and sometimes it's, you know, it's -- it was a personal issue between electeds and the manager and it just -- it created an impact on the morale of all the employees. It created a culture of fear that, you know, we think it's impacting the executive level, but it trickles all the way down to the person -- the security guard, the receptionist, the person that picks up the gar -- you know, the waste. It impacts everyone, even from the counselor at the Youth Center. And you know, for anybody who thinks that the City of Miami is better today for having a revolving door of city managers, then you just haven't been paying attention. City of Miami, with all due respect -- and I have friends there and I've worked there, and there are some great people there -- it's pretty dysfunctional. Just pick up the newspaper of late and their dirty laundry is all over the place. And it makes me think, you know, where we're at today. It's interesting because someone -- I think a resident mentioned Abraham Lincoln earlier, and I had him in my mind. Abraham Lincoln had it right when he said a house divided cannot stand. And our city has stood for a hundred years, and I'm very concerned that I'm seeing it starting to tear apart in its foundation. And I'm one who, having been a lifelong resident, can't support or encourage or condone anything that moves us, even moves the needle a little bit in the direction that we become further and further divided. I'm all for -- and actually when I became a Commissioner, one of my first meetings with -- was with a resident that's here in the chamber, and we agreed to work on the process, work on the policy, how can we make things better. And we shook hands on it. And to this day, every day that I come to work, and every day my colleagues come to work, every day the Manager and staff come to work, we're trying to make things better. Are we perfect? No, I don't think anyone's perfect. But our focus is on those things that get us where we need to be as a city. And we try -- at least I try to stay out of those things that pull us back. So, what my statement to my colleagues, my new colleagues, that I'm here to work with

you on the process, the policies, those things that are positive that take us to the next level. You have my unwavering support and commitment, but I've experienced it as an employee, that culture of fear, because the folks at top are making decisions that for some at the lower level, they don't understand. So, I'm not there yet to go and support the direction you want with G-3, but I do give you my unwavering commitment -- and I think you know that very well -- that I will work with you to make the policies, the procedures, the best possible for our residents. You have my unwavering commitment on that.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Dear Peter, dearest City Manager, you're a great person. And when I saw this agenda, my heart dropped. I'm like, this is my first Commission meeting. Wow, big one. However, I'm not here to decide on myself, right? And I would like to speak out for what residents, how they feel, because they've come up to me and expressed their concerns without me even asking, and this is something completely new to me, right? I don't understand where we've gone wrong with the residents, but they have very strongly spoken and they're not very satisfied with you as a manager. And it breaks my heart to say it to you, but it's true and I have to stand by the people who elected me, which is the residents. So, that's as much as I can say.

Mayor Lago: So, it's 2:20. I'd like to call the question, unless Commissioner Anderson...

Commissioner Fernandez: Oh, I just have one question for Commissioner Anderson and Commissioner Menendez because I think both of you left it -- I didn't perhaps answer the question you were looking for in order to make a decision. I think that's basically what both of you have said.

Commissioner Menendez: Oh, if a vote is called to dismiss the City Manager, I don't support that decision.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right. Just in general, you're not looking for additional -- the way I understood it, you were looking for additional information, perhaps.

Commissioner Menendez: No. My way of looking at how to make the City better is by focusing on those things that actually, in my opinion, make a difference. Policy, procedure, our positions on different issues, on working together to move agendas forward. That's my focus on making the City better, and that's where I am today, focusing on those things, not on a particular city manager, police chief, city attorney. I think, let's give it a shot where we work together on policy and procedure, and if it doesn't work, we can step back at another time and see where things came -- you know, where perhaps things didn't work out. But I'd rather go first in one direction before going in a different direction.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think -- I think it's fairly clear that you're in a new role, and in this new role, you'll be able to observe how the City Manager follows the direction of the Commission, and you'll have those conversations. There are going to be times that we agree among the Commissioners to disagree on an issue. It is not the City Manager's choice. It is his choice -- his only direction is to follow the will of the Commission. So, I have found that he has unwaveringly followed the will of the Commission on items. And we can give the City Manager direction in areas where you feel that the direction needs to change. But it is going to have to be a vote of the majority of the Commission. And he needs -- you know, the Manager will continue to follow, I'm confident, the will of this Commission moving forward. It is a different Commission. As you would say, it's a new day. And I hope that we can work together and do many positive things together.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor, you had...

Mayor Lago: So...

Commissioner Fernandez: A comment.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me?

Commissioner Fernandez: You had a comment.

Mayor Lago: No, no. I was calling the ques -- I was -- I called the question, but we continued to have a conversation. What is the will --? As the sponsor of this discussion item, what would you like to do so we can move on to have lunch and we have a...

Commissioner Fernandez: Sure.

Mayor Lago: We have an immensely long agenda.

Commissioner Fernandez: I mean, the conversation that I had with residents last night and over the course of this campaign is they wanted to vote, whether it passed or failed, they wanted to vote on the record. So, I will make a motion to terminate the City Manager.

Commissioner Castro: I second.

City Clerk Urquia: Would you like me to call the roll?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: No.

Commissioner Castro: Aye.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: For my reasons stated on the record, no.

Mayor Lago: No.

(Vote: 2-3)

Mayor Lago: With that being said, I'd like to pass the gavel over to the Vice Mayor, which I will name Commissioner Anderson in a few moments, and I'd like to do a vote of confidence for the Manager. Will anybody...?

City Clerk Urquia: May I please have a second?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, I'm not allowed to second, right?

Mayor Lago: Yeah, you can.

Commissioner Fernandez: You are -- you are allowed to second.

Mayor Lago: The Vice Mayor, you can.

City Clerk Urquia: You can second.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll second.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner Castro?

Commissioner Fernandez: Can you explain the vote of confidence?

Commissioner Castro: Yeah, yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think that's...

Mayor Lago: It's simply -- it's a vote of confidence. It's a vote of confidence for the Manager, very clearly, that we're going to work together, that we're going to find an opportunity to push the City agenda forward, listening to the residents, listening to the business owners, and having a new day here in the City of Coral Gables following the will of the Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, I think a vote of confidence is a vote of confidence on his ability to do the job.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, with all due respect, it's my motion, and I'm making the motion, and I would like for that to be what it is.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, it's a separate vote. It's not a vote of confidence.

Mayor Lago: It's a very simple -- it's a vote of confidence including what I said.

Commissioner Menendez: Exactly.

Mayor Lago: We have a second on the floor.

Commissioner Castro: Yes, I think we don't have enough votes here, Peter, and I haven't had the chance to really work with you, but given the circumstances that you will stay, I'm more than willing to work with you.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

(Vote: 4-1).

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I'm going to call a 20-minute recess to grab some lunch. I appreciate it. Thank you.