

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
September 13, 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

Public Speaker(s)

Doug Mayer

Lynne Blustein

Maria Cruz

Gordon Sokoloff

Agenda Item C [12:52 p.m.]

Public Comments

Mayor: Moving onto Public Comments.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, first speaker today is Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, the floor is yours.

City Clerk Urquia: She stepped away.

Mayor Lago: We'll come back to her.

City Commission Meeting

September 13, 2023

City Clerk Urquia: Doug Mayer.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Mayer, good afternoon. Thank you for being here. Sorry for the wait.

Mr. Mayer: That's okay. Thank you very much. My name is Doug Mayer, its okay. I live at 1101 Cortez Street, which is in Little Gables. I dropped off a copy of this, you should have each had one on your desk when you just sat down. I am working with a group called Neighbors for the Preservation of Little Gables, and our group is against annexation of Little Gables by the city. There are a number of reasons why we are and I'm not going to go into those, but two days ago, my wife and I received this letter from the city announcing the annexation and that they were going to get public comment and so on, which was fine, except that inside there was this form and it says, yes to in favor of annexation of Little Gables by the city. I sat there and I looked at this and I said, well, where's the place where I mark that I'm not I favor of this, and of course its not on here. So, somebody from the city sent out a form asking for my opinion and gave me the choice of yes or yes, but there's no way on this form that you can say, no, unless you want to write it on red and send it in. So, I would urge the city to be a little more even-handed. If you're really interested in what we think in Little Gables, give us the opportunity to respond to either side of the issue. Don't chose for us, like sending us a card that we're supposed to mail back in that only says yes.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

City Clerk Urquia: Lynn Blustein.

Mayor Lago: Before we move onto the next person. Mr. Manager, will you respond in regard to why this was done this way.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, of course, Mayor. This is a petition not a ballot. What its doing is just asking if there's 20 percent of the people who want to move forward, so its just a yes. If you don't send it in, its obviously a no or I don't care. But this is a petition and it's a first step in moving forward. So, I think there are some that are thinking this is a ballot. This is a petition. When it goes through the process then there will be a ballot, a final ballot that will say yes or no.

Mr. Mayer: I'm sorry sir. I don't care what you call it, a petition, whatever. It still has a statement on it and it only says, I'm in favor of annexation. It does not give a person who receives it the opportunity to object to the whole idea of annexation. So, however it went
City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023

out, whatever the intention was, I object to the fact that it went out that way. It should have been a more equal opportunity for people to either be for or against the proposal and it just looks like the city is setting this up for the result that they hope to get, and that bothers me.

Mayor Lago: You will have a ballot, moving forward, you will have a ballot. This is the protocol set forth in the county. The only way it gets to a ballot is if we receive 20 percent threshold petition. Once you have that ballot it will have a yes or no option for you to vote which way you would like.

Mr. Mayer: I realize that. But I think this is deceptive at best.

Mayor Lago: And I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mayer: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: I just want to put in the record, I had nothing to do with this, because I've been getting a lot of e-mails and calls regarding this. I had no input in any of this.

Mayor Lago: Ma'am.

Ms. Blustein: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Lynne Blustein, 4330 S.W. 15 Street. I was born in Doctor's Hospital, Gables High, Class of '71 and chances are I've been around here longer than most of you. I decided to educate myself on the history of Coral Gables and found the following on the Coral Gables Museum website. Coral Gables is often referred to as "The City Beautiful." In truth, the city is nothing short of beautiful. Its winding boulevards, lush green treescapes, and uniform architectural styles have earned it the reputation of being a city wherein nothing is unlovely. Coral Gables utilized and appreciated the concept of a planned city where nothing was built without the consideration of the impact on the surrounding urban environment. While George Merrick did not initially intend for Coral Gables to become a city, he adhered to the concepts which were laid out by The City Beautiful movement and in 1925, when Coral Gables voted to become a city against Merrick's will, it was coined, "The City Beautiful." I can only imagine that the residents who have invested their lives and fortunes in living and working in Coral Gables would like to see the continuation of George Merrick's vision. The biggest issue and perhaps the most important issue is the issue of 911 emergency services. Miami, and when I say that, I mean Greater Miami, that does include Coral Gables and all of Dade County cities is claiming to be the new tech center of the United States. You cannot tell me that in the year 2023, while we are sending rockets to the moon and Mars that we cannot create a countywide 911 system that actually works in favor of anyone who calls. Bottom

*City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023*

line – if you're in Miami-Dade County anywhere, and you dial 911, the very closest emergency service, no matter where it is should be, excuse me, I lost my place.

Mayor Lago: Take your time.

Ms. Blustein: Yes. If you dial 911, the very closest emergency service, no matter where it is should be dispatched to you. If you live in Little Gables and the closest 911 dispatch is in Coral Gables, no problem. If you live in a part of Coral Gables where you are closer to a different emergency station, you'll be better off getting service more quickly from your closest station. I am calling on every Mayor and Commissioner in all Miami-Dade County cities to put together a 911 system that will serve everybody efficiently and quickly and not be affected by boundaries. It isn't rocket science. Lives are at stake. Show the residents of Miami-Dade County that you are smart, that you care, and that you make a vow to do this, and if you are unable to do it, pass your job unto someone that can make it happen. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.

City Clerk Urquia: Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, welcome back.

Ms. Cruz: Good afternoon, Maria Cruz, Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Short and sweet. I have a few short comments. F-7 – we talked about a city park after Sallye Jude and Mayor Dorothy Thomson. I think should be a city park named after Sallye Jude, well deserved, and a city park named after Mayor Thomson. Somebody brought to me that the naming is for people that have passed, because people worry what could they do before they die that would bring about changing the name. I am sure that Mayor Dorothy Thomson will not get in trouble between now and the time she passes. So, I think there should be a park on her name. The rest of the living humans can wait till they die.

Mayor Lago: As the sponsor of that item that was a typo and the intention was to have two parks.

Ms. Cruz: F-6 – We are talking about maintenance of business properties. I love the idea, but we have a problem, because we have other properties in the city and I'm going to tell you, many, many, many months ago, when I had white roofs, I got cited many times because my roof was never cleaned because of the busses going on over the dirt. So can we please start looking at roofs again, making the roofs look good, and landscaping. May
City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023

I suggest that somebody needs to drive on San Amaro Drive and see what's going on there with the median and the landscaping. Now the latest is that if the landscaping is bad, they are putting river rocks on it, not crushed rock, humungous river rocks on the little islands. I don't think those are allowed. So, let's see, and the third one, a reminder that you all said, because we seem to forget that there were some areas that there would be sidewalks as part of the agreement when the properties were sold or leased or whatever. Doctor's Hospital still does not have sidewalks. If you try to get in there, you have to walk on the street, okay, and now there are bushes that, I don't know where they are going to put the sidewalk, because they build there so sidewalks are not easy to put there, but we do need sidewalks. And an opportunity to go to the Emergency Room, once you go there you have to get on the street or else you have to get a helicopter, okay. So, please remember, they agreed to put sidewalks there. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: If I may address. I spoke to Mr. Hermes Diaz. I'm the one that requested when that transaction occurred that they include all the sidewalks and they pay for the sidewalks and they pay for the street, fixing the street so it looks in uniform with the University of Miami. Those sidewalks are being currently worked on in reference to design and they are also going to include University, correct Mr. Manager.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct Mayor. The design is almost complete. We've already had meetings with Doctor's Hospital and Baptist, and once this is finalized, we'll have one more meeting and then initiate the construction process.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Gordon Sokoloff.

Mayor Lago: Dr. Sokoloff, welcome back.

Dr. Sokoloff: Hi, Gordon Sokoloff, 225 Alesio Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida, planet Earth. I want to just talk about two items, because I'm not going to be able to stay throughout the duration of the meeting. One was F-17, which was the City Commission creating the Charter Review Committee. I like that idea. I think its time and it seems to be the anniversary for that to occur. What I think is important has been lost in other appointments, for instance, the Plater-Zybert Committee that was appointed and there wasn't resident, like true resident representation on that board. There were a lot of developers, architects, attorneys, and I think that if you're going to do a Charter Review, it is good to include some grassroots, home-grown, born and raised, just like me, residents to serve on that committee. I believe that's what Commissioner Fernandez is getting at is, just

*City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023*

true representation from residents without any other kind of special interest involved. That's been one of the violations of some of the other – actually in frankness, even on some of the boards. The other item I wanted to speak with, which was on F-6, I think Mayor Lago mentioned this. I'm not even sure what the discussion is going to be about, but I do have a property on Ponce and its about the maintenance of landscaping in the front and back of the property, which is our responsibility, which I embrace. I understand that and I think I've done a good job with my own property along Ponce. However, I'd like to mention that the cracks in the sidewalk along Camilo and Ponce where my building is, I brought up to the city nearly a year ago. One of the frustrations that residents often have is that the city and the Code Enforcement are saying, do as we say, not as we do, and I think that when I have to pressure clean my sidewalks when I have a canopy of trees that is in gross need of trimming. Its those trees and the canopy which creates all the mildew on the sidewalks and the cracks on the sidewalks, those things should be addressed as soon as possible. So, residents like me, are happy to comply, but the city has to do a better job on their part, I believe. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, we're going to go on Zoom. Our speaker is going to Sheryl Gold.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, welcome back.

Ms. Gold: Good afternoon, Mayor and Commissioners, Sheryl Gold, 721 Biltmore Way. First, I want to thank Commissioners Castro, Fernandez and Menendez for keeping our local elections in April. I think this is what will serve the community best. So thank you for that. I'm speaking now because comment is no longer permitted when an agenda item is being discussed later on the agenda. So, I'm going to talk about Biltmore Way now, because I won't be allowed to comment later. Since I previously sent to you all a detailed three-page letter, I will take this opportunity now to share with the public some history and facts. I am now in my seventh-year advocating for the transformation of a massive urban heat island into a four-block walkable corridor, lowering temperatures by as much as 20 degrees, reducing energy use, improving stormwater management, absorbing CO2 emissions from auto and air traffic and beautifying the neighborhood. During these seven years, I have spent countless hours discussing various proposals with staff, elected officials and neighbors. I even collaborated with an award-winning designer of public spaces on concept plans and tree species. I have appeared before the Commission on numerous occasions, written e-mails, participated in phone calls, met with residents and attended city meetings. The city established a process. It hired three consultants to date. It held
City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023

community meetings in 2018 and the spring of this year. Both times residents voted for their preferences. Your own Public Works Director confirmed at a recent Commission meeting that all the residents except for one table voted for the same option. Nevertheless, because the results did not turn out the way Commissioner Anderson wanted, yet another traffic study was requested and yet another community meeting was planned for the fall. And despite the democratic process that has already taken place, the Commissioner is seeking to meet on an individual basis with residents and condo boards to review options and get their preferences for what goes in front of their buildings. Are these the same options that were previously voted on or are they new ones? Asking buildings what they want in front of their building is a preposterous approach to a streetscape CIP. One developer wants to eliminate all parking spaces in order to have an Uber drop-off and pick-up, disguised as a fire zone. Another building may prefer a particular tree species. Another building may want flashing signals at a crosswalk, while other do not. This would amount to a streetscape plan conceived by a camel. This long-awaited project should be designed wholistically, even if implemented at different times. The vote has been taken, twice in a democratic process. The residents want a modest project at a modest cost. Planting a mix of shade trees on the sidewalk with silver...keeping the parking as it currently exists, adding traffic calming, crosswalks and lowering the speed limit, no median, no bike lanes for good reasons. Think about the public safety risks do to the volume of cars using multiple driveways and garages and, of course, extreme heat. A million-dollar project versus anything up to \$8 million dollars with no special taxing district. Afterall, street trees and sidewalks are infrastructure and the responsibility of the municipality. Enough is enough. Stop the gaslighting. It is time to identify funding and implement the long-delayed project that the residents want, and the climate crisis demands now more than ever. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Just a quick response. The items on discussion, that look toward a vote, there can be comments on those items, if the Commission so deems it appropriate. So, I just want to make sure Ms. Gold is aware of that. There is an item being brought forward.

Ms. Gold: I checked with the City Clerk first thing this morning at 9 o'clock. I've been on this Zoom meeting since 9 a.m. and I asked if I could put it later or if I had to go this morning in the Public Comment, which I thought was going to come this morning, and I was told I would be in the queue, it would have to be in the Public Comment. So, I just wanted to let you know why I've been here for four hours now.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold, I apologize for you having to wait for Public Comment, we just ran over on our time certain at 9:30, but you are allowed to make public comment in Public Comment. I started that a few years ago, it's a good opportunity to speak and get your voice

City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023

heard; and on the issues of discussion items, I was voted against 4 to 1 and you are allowed to make comment you like on discussion items. I actually removed my Mayor's Comments and I put them in line, as long as the person who is the sponsor votes on the issue and there's a resolution attached to it, right, correct.

City Manager Iglesias: If there's a resolution.

Mayor Lago: If there's a resolution attached to it.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Attorney Suarez: May I just clarify that point.

Mayor Lago: Of course, you can.

City Attorney Suarez: The resolution was that the sponsor of the item could request the public comment be allowed on the discussion items.

Mayor Lago: Exactly. That's what I said. So, if a person – that's exactly what I said, exactly what I said. Let me just run the meeting, let me run the meeting and everybody has an opportunity to talk, everybody is going to be free to say what they'd like to say, no one is being held back. We have multiple opportunities to speak here, everybody just has to sign up. So, in regard to this item, no one is being gaslit. We are here to listen on the issue of Biltmore Way. This Commission, myself, Commissioner Anderson, Commissioner Menendez has been involved, has been pushing this item for four-five years to have a conversation about Biltmore Way. Mr. Manager, when is our next public meeting.

City Manager Iglesias: Dover Kohl will be setting up a meeting now after September. I'm not exactly sure, its coming next month or so, because we wanted to wait until after the summer when everybody was back.

Mayor Lago: We engaged Dover Kohl, we wanted to wait. We've had issues before when we've had these public meetings in the summer, we wanted to make sure that everybody was in town, for example, like Ms. Gold was not in town for certain parts of the year and to have a real robust conversation and move forward. I'm 100 percent in favor of doing something there on Biltmore Way, but we have to be honest with ourselves, depending on the price tag and funding, there are different routes. Either you're going to save, like we

*City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023*

normally do for capital projects over a number of years, or you are going to do a special taxing district. What is going to be the actual funding? So what we're trying to see is, have different options be brought forward, we price them out, and then we go back to the community and say look, these are the costs and this is what we're looking at in regards to a funding strategy. That's my understanding.

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct Mayor. We need to establish what the scopes are in order to establish cost, in order to establish funding.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, is there anything else – anybody else that would like to speak? Go ahead Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: City Attorney, could I have some clarity, because I believe that what was passed 4 to 1 was Public Comment at the discretion of the Mayor and it was going to be on the agenda beforehand, was that not it?

City Attorney Suarez: So the sponsor can request it, just like you request a time certain, you can request that there be public comment allowed on the discussion item, that was the resolution.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So, does it have to be on the agenda?

City Attorney Suarez: You should ask in advance. I mean you could always ask for it now, you always have the ability to request it now, but you could also ask for it in advance.

Commissioner Castro: Because I think what the Mayor was saying is that discussion items are open to discussion for public comment.

Mayor Lago: If I may.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: I said, was very clear. In a 4 to 1 vote, where I voted against, its very simple, if you put forward a discussion item and you would like to have that item be open to the public so they could speak on, it never has been before. Its always has been a Commission opportunity to discuss in the Sunshine, you just have to request that. That's it. It was in the language that was put forth by Commissioner Anderson, excuse me, Vice Mayor Anderson and Commissioner Menendez. That was what was put forth, that's what was passed. So that is exactly what we can do. There's multiple opportunities to speak on every single

*City Commission Meeting
September 13, 2023*

issue, including Public Comment. So Mr. Clerk, can we move on, so we can move onto the next person, the next speaker.

City Clerk Urquia: There are no more.

Mayor Lago: I would like to close the Public Comment and I would like to hear, I'd like to have a motion in regard to our Consent Agenda. We have a very large agenda today, we haven't even gotten to Consent.

Commissioner Castro: We have a resident trying to talk. Can you give her permission.

Speaker: [Inaudible – off mic]

City Clerk Urquia: That is correct. I did say that.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, will you please address the issue with the resident please. Let's move on with the Commission, maybe we can have someone from your team have a conversation with the resident.

City Attorney Suarez: Oh, individually, yes.

Mayor Lago: And explain exactly how...

City Attorney Suarez: Perfect Mayor. That makes sense.

Mayor Lago: I didn't write the legislation. Commissioner Menendez did and the Vice Mayor did, and it passed 4 to 1. Who wrote the legislation, it was the Vice Mayor?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I wrote the legislation. I wanted it to operate in the same manner that we do when we ask for something to be time certain. That's the model. You can hear a discussion item. All you have to do is ask and you may receive. Now, Mayor, with a little leeway, I would like to clarify for Ms. Gold one thing. I didn't push any particular designs. There are folks from the Transportation Advisory Board that were serving at the time that wanted to put bike lanes. It wasn't me. Ms. Gold, if you want to have a nice discussion about funding options, stay tuned for this afternoon, and we can discuss it at that time. I was going to come to your building in person but let me know when you're ready or stay tuned this afternoon we'll have that discussion then.

Commissioner Menendez: Mayor, I have a really quick question for the City Attorney or I guess maybe the Clerk. So, under the legislation that was approved, if a resident sees the discussion item on the agenda and they wish to speak, are they allowed to reach out to the sponsor of the legislation, let them know ahead of time that they would be interested in speaking. That way they are not waiting two or three, four hours to see if that's going to happen.

City Attorney Suarez: So, I think the intent was that it would be done in advance of the publication of the agenda so that the public would know, in advance would know if public comment would be allowed in a discussion item. The default answer is, is there public comment on a discussion item would be no, unless its noted that there will be public comment allowed. Now, certainly a resident can always reach out to an elected official and the elected official can make the motion here or at any moment to...

Commissioner Menendez: I think that's the way to avoid confusion.

Mayor Lago: I have a better idea, because again, the plan is to reduce the powers of the Mayor as much as possible and chip away at that. Just let's – let's just allow all public comment in discussions and everybody can talk on all the issues as many people who wants to sign up, along with Public Comment, along with Referendums, along with Resolutions, Ordinances, City Manager, City Attorney, all that stuff is already available for public comment. Let's just allow everything to have a conversation.

Commissioner Castro: If you move it, I'll second.

Mayor Lago: Why don't you draft that, and we'll come back. The person whose legislation that was brought forth was the Vice Mayor, you guys can work on that together, if you'd like. I'm perfectly fine with whatever you guys would like to do, have as much comment as you'd like. Mr. Clerk are we done.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.