

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C
September 24, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

**Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

City Staff

**City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

Public Speaker(s)

**Maria Cruz
Roland Rodriguez**

Agenda Item C [9:15 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker this morning Mr. Mayor is Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Good morning. It's a beautiful day in the Beautiful City. Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Have a wonderful meeting. Let's hope that at the end, we'll still be celebrating the wonderful day the Lord has made. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Roland Rodriguez.

*City Commission Meeting
September 24, 2024*

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir. Thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Rodriguez: Good morning. I understand this is not on the agenda, but we thought we wanted to – its on behalf of the neighbors who wanted to speak on the item. Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners, my name is Roland Rodriguez. I reside at 3310 Alhambra Circle. I'm here to express my concerns on how the Commission has handled the issue of the proposed pedestrian sidewalks along Alhambra Circle. I understand that this issue has been a topic of discussion for some time. Now, with the special interest groups led by single resident heavily involved. At last Commission meeting, H-1 was discussed. This was to be a presentation of the results of our July ballots where four directly impacted residents unanimously voted in favor of sidewalks using Option 1. Our ballots were completely ignored, and it quickly turned into a discussion of options on the premise of safety. However, it is clear that the decision was heavily influenced and opposed by one single resident, Robert Ruano. A well-known resident to the city through his special interest group. One single resident and his own special interest group opposing a unanimous vote of four directly impacted residents. Ruano, who is not an engineer, stood here last Commission and quoted the Florida Green Book without discussing context or engineering judgement. I'm not part of a special interest group. I'm not a politician and I'm not an attorney and won't pretend to be either. I am, however, a licensed professional engineer and I'm familiar with the Florida Green Book. Out of the 553-page document, he picked one page to fit his narrative without taking context or engineering judgement into account. You have professional engineers on staff that went on record to say that a curb and sidewalk is a safe and commonly used design as seen throughout our city and specifically along San Amaro. Ruano calls us new residents and is obsessed with saying we only want bigger front yards without regard to safety of the community. However, we have never made any mention or argument regarding the size of our yard. If we wanted bigger yards, we would have voted no to sidewalks. As residents, we love our homes and neighborhood and pay taxes to our city just as he does. As we have clearly voted, we are not opposed to sidewalks, but we want to maintain our beautiful trees lining Alhambra Circle and our vote implemented. Ruano indicated the balloting or seeking engagement from residents is an unprecedented move. From my research, Ruano offers residents ballots when it fits his narrative, however, he's opposed when they don't. In a letter from Ruano, attached to the January 2020 Gables Insider article, and quote, "The fact that the city is providing a vote at the end of the month, where affected residents on Alhambra and side streets can vote on the project is indicative of the transparency with which the city is working. Both Vision Zero and Alhambra Circle Lane resolutions mention community outreach, community engagement and resident support. Seeking community engagement and even balloting is not an unprecedented move. Our votes have been completely ignored on the premise of safety with no justification or statistical facts as to how that concern was reached. The only safety concerns how this Commission continually delaying the process for over four years and having my neighbors, and I continue to walk on the street in front of our homes. Our ballots were clear in their intention. The city will proceed with the sidewalk option that received the most votes.

[Timer bell rang]

Mayor Lago: Please move forward.

*City Commission Meeting
September 24, 2024*

Mr. Rodriguez: Why were our ballots ignored? Was it not a clear direction from the May 21st Commission? Why were no safety concerns from the Commission discussed prior to sending out the ballots? Commissioners Castro, Fernandez and Menendez rejected our ballots, but what are your specific and verifiable concerns. I have requested public records for safety and crash reports that validates our concern or concurs any possible safety concerns. Alhambra, between the bridge and Bird Road still remains without sidewalks and will present bigger challenges as the right-of-way is lessened and beautiful mature oaks are in conflict. Are we going to allow Ruano and his interest group to bully our community and attempt to make all pedestrian decisions in our community? Or are we going to make this democratic process whereby directly impacted residents have a say and a vote? We are extremely disappointed at the undemocratic decision made during last Commission meeting regarding this matter and urge that this matter move forward as represented by our ballots. Our vote has been made clear and we want Option 1 implemented. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Lago: Sir, thank you for being here with us. Mr. Clerk.

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

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, we'll close the public comment.

[Note for the Record] Public Comment resumed at the Mayor's request.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, I forgot that we have one individual that we missed on Public Comment. I apologize.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, yes, Mr. Gonzalo Sanabria has requested to speak.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Sanabria. Thank you for being here with us.

Mr. Sanabria: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Sanabria: I have a message, a message directed to the three of you. Commissioner Fernandez, Commissioner Castro, and Commissioner Menendez, you have done a disservice to the city and you know it. You did an ambush hire of an unqualified City Manager who I understand is a charming gentleman, has an open-door policy, has roundtable meetings, he's popular with staff, but Mr. Manager, you are not cut out to be a City Manager. You just don't have it in you. And I apologize for saying this in public and I'm going to continue to harp on this publicly, not just at this public meeting, but everywhere that the citizens of Coral Gables congregate until its very well known, that you had made a mistake, a mistake that cost the city \$1,000 a day, \$1,000 a day. Let me explain to you why. Put this on the camera please. This is City Manager Swanson's base salary, \$205,000, facts. This is City Manager Salerno's starting salary, \$190,000, fact. This is City Manager Iglesias starting salary \$235,000 is a fact. So what do we have now, we have an unqualified City Manager, voted in, in an ambush situation by Commissioner Fernandez,
City Commission Meeting
September 24, 2024

Commissioner Castro, and you, Commissioner Menendez, \$282,000, but that's not the end. The end is that there is an additional \$71,500 that City Manager has opted to be paid into his paycheck in lieu of pension. Then when you add it all up, its well over \$365,000, its \$1,000 a day that you are taking from the city's cauffers an unqualified person, and I'm going to ask restitution from the three of you. You should pay back to the city restitution of \$1,000 a day since you've been wasting this money on an unqualified candidate. That's the end of my presentation. Its not going to stop. I hope you realize that you have to come to your senses and make the right decision.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.