

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item K
June 2, 2026
Public Safety Building, CMR
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item K
Discussion Items

Mayor Lago: Madam Vice Mayor, anything else for the good of the order unless I missed something, Mr. Clerk, did I?

City Clerk Urquia: No, sir.

Mayor Lago: All right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I hope everybody has a beautiful and safe week. I'll see you tomorrow morning. Bright and early.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: See you tomorrow morning. Very exciting morning. I can't wait.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Lara.

Commissioner Lara: I thank you all for a very productive meeting today. See you all very, very soon.

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Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: I think we've gotten a lot of good things accomplished today. You know, sometimes we get heated up here. And if I've been out of line today, I apologize for letting my Cuban blood get the best of me. But I look forward to continuing working collegially on this Commission to bring about the best results for our city.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Few points. And I forgot to mention, by the way, Mr. Manager, you forgot about Hernan Vaz, going to be the artist, God willing, in the Mobility Hub, the most important artist to come out of Miami. It's a big deal for us. He went to New World, world respected. And these are just other little things in regard to the mobility hub that again are going to be amazing. There's a lot of facets to the mobility hub that are really incredible. One of the things I want to commend staff and our whole team, we wrote a letter to Senator Bryan Avila and had conversations with him today in regard to outlining our concerns regarding the proposed tax bill. I thank you to the Manager, his team, I thank you, our Government Affairs Director, for preparing that long letter, working with Lora and the Manager to get it out there. Just to give you a quick understanding so you understand the implications that we're facing. Again, I'm going to be very clear before they say I'm against it. I'm in favor of property tax reform, but we have to be honest with ourselves. Because I mentioned something on social media today. Hey, he's against property tax reform. I'm not against property tax reform. The bottom line is that you have to understand the implications of the property tax reform. What is that going to do? It's going to have an implication on our budget. And we're going to learn a little bit more about that tomorrow and it's still up in the air. If Homestead exemption is raised to \$250,000 and correct me if I'm wrong, the city would lose approximately over \$11 million, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: That's correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: The following subsequent year, we'll go up to \$500,000. That will be about \$23 million, \$22.6 million loss in the budget. Mr. Manager, what are we talking about our budget excluding capital improvements on a yearly basis?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, if we lose \$22 million, I don't know, it's going to be hard to recover.

Mayor Lago: So, with that being said, we need to have real, we need to start having real conversations. Sea level rise fund, which I started with Jim Cason and when it was here, it's \$4 million a year. We have \$30 million. We may not be able to fund that. How do we pick up the garbage? The garbage, these are real conversations. You got to make the money up somehow. You just can't walk away into the sunset. How do you pick up the garbage? How are we going to continue to overfund the pensions?

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, we're subsidizing about \$8.9 million of garbage from the General Fund right now.

Mayor Lago: How are we going to, are we going to continue to overfund the pension? Last year it was nine and a half million. We started doing this at \$4 million, 2015 when I got here. This year it was over seven and-a-half million. I'm just giving you some major numbers of things that we do here in the city to ensure quality of life and to ensure that we're fiscally responsible. That was part of the letter that we sent, obviously to our respected Senator Bryan Avila. These are real conversations that we're going to be having. It may not be tomorrow in the budget hearing, but these are real conversations that I want people to become aware. There's a good side to this, but there's also a side that has consequences. We also have negotiations forthcoming in June and July. The Manager's team is going to start working with the fire and the police unions. We got to offer them a deal. We got to offer them something that's respectable. And again, that's going to increase costs. So, and then we have obviously a laundry list of capital projects that we have to address. Well, those are things just to kind of keep in the forefront of our mind as we continue to work down this process. Talking about the World Cup and community events. I want to thank the ACM. I know she's working with the Plaza and to potentially doing something in Ponce Circle Park. I'm getting a lot of calls in regard to what's going to be happening during the World Cup. I think it's going to be great. I'm looking forward to the activation. There's also, excuse me, multiple activations that are part of FIFA here in the city that you're going to be seeing coming up. Thank you to your staff for doing a great job on that. Something that was not mentioned today that I want to mention, and I would like for the Manager via Martha Pantin and her team to put out tomorrow. Let's put out an email tomorrow with the support of the Commission because tomorrow is George Merrick's birthday. And I would like to put out a simple one-page email that talks about who was George Merrick? Who was our founder? What did he do? How did he come to the City Beautiful? And how did he die? He bet it all on Coral Gables and he died a broke man because he believed in the vision of Coral Gables. He believed in the City Beautiful. And I want to highlight that. Most people haven't had the opportunity to read his books. I read a few of his books. I've seen some of the plays, especially the play that Allen Morris's wife put together, which was incredible. I wish that ran again. And it really talked about the hero that he was, the friendships that he made. And the visionary that he was. So, I would like to, with the input of my colleagues and staff, come up with something that, again, maybe a few photos of George Merrick as a child George Merrick while he was here in the orange fields. And right before George Merrick passed away, we can include some photos to give people a little bit of context. Also include some of the background in regard to the Bahamians that he obviously entrusted with his vision. And they were the ones that delivered upon his vision. They were the rock masons. They were the ones that knew. It's a story that we're memorializing in a beautiful sculpture across the street from City Hall. Maybe we can include a little bit of information on those partners of ours here in the City Beautiful.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

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Commissioner Fernandez: Potentially an easier way to do it would be for us to put out our Merrick Minutes. I think there was one that Joanne Marr did on George Merrick. I think she read one of the letters where he talked about the relationship with the Bahamian community. But she did several that were specific to George Merrick and his vision. And a lot of people maybe didn't get an opportunity to see it. I think it'd be a good way to highlight it in addition to the short script.

Mayor Lago: I guess I'm up to any suggestions. Here goes Martha. She heard her name. I thought Martha had gone home. She's always here. Yes, ma'am. Don't tell me. Give me credit. Let me get credit for it. Don't take it away from me. I'm just kidding.

Communications Director Martha Pantin: Tomorrow we have-- Martha Pantin.

Mayor Lago: I know you're already doing it for sure.

Communications Director Martha Pantin: Communications and Public Affairs. Tomorrow, we do have a post about his birthday on social media. And we will also include it on E-news. I caution against sending a separate one-page email because if we send too many things out, it becomes spam. And we pride ourselves in having a 55% or above open rate, which is way above the government average. And I think that it's best just to use the tools we have. As far as Joanne's Marrs Merrick Moments, they are actually all on our Centennial website, which we have kept active.

Mayor Lago: Can I ask you for a favor through the Manager? Can you do me a favor? I know that we don't do this. We never do this. Can you tag the Commission so that we can repost whatever you put, let's say on Twitter or Instagram, just for this one time, because I don't want, I'm going to post something and I'd rather it just be uniform in regard to the content, in regard to George Merrick's birthday. I mean, I think it's a simple benign request where, you know, I know that we kind of, we try to be very careful on Sunshine and politics and I respect that, but on this issue, I think it's something that we should all be uniform, the city, the five elected officials, because I want people to know who George Merrick is and take pride. We had a moment in the city. I don't think it was, I think it was just the Vice Mayor and myself, but we dealt with issues here in the city where George Merrick was characterized as an individual who he was not, okay. And, you know, I want to commend a lot of people in this community who stepped up and said, you know, George Merrick had his flaws, we all do. It was a different time, but at the end of the day, George Merrick was a visionary. George Merrick was a person who helped those in this community and made sure that those that were most in need were taken care of. So, I want to make sure that people come to an understanding of who George Merrick is, especially those who are moving into our city and may not really understand. Maybe they get interested and they grow an appetite for learning.

Communications Director Martha Pantin: Well, I will say that we are safeguarding the history of our city. We, pretty soon, we will have on our website, and we will have an exhibition at the museum of the 25 people that have served as mayors of Coral Gables. We've restored the pictures that were outside your offices. We have included a bio of each one, a short bio of 125 words or

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less. Some were very hard to find. We had to look through obituaries, et cetera. We did reach out. We did reach out to some family members. For example, Keith, I can't think of the last name, that his father and grandfather were mayors. So, we are preserving the history. Our next step is working with the City Clerk's office. We are making sure that we have everyone that has served, and this is going to be by year in the Commission and we're also going to put that on the website. So, we are interested in preserving our history and we will definitely tag you tomorrow, all of you for our George Merrick post.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Mr. Manager, anything else for the good of the order?

City Manager Iglesias: No, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: While Ms. Pantin's here, I have one more ask.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, so I had spoken-

Mayor Lago: You haven't had enough pain already at seven o'clock at night, you want more?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes, yes, yes.

Mayor Lago: Okay, that's fine. Don't forget, I'm in good shape, but my back hurts a little bit from this morning.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Oh, well, you know, no pain, no gain, right.

Mayor Lago: Right.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I spoke with our Economic Development Department about creating information regarding restaurants. They're going to be showing the FIFA games, the World Cup games, and I'd like for our Communications team to also share that with us so that we can repost it as well.

Communications Director Martha Pantin: Okay, tomorrow in the E-news, the top story is actually going to be about a FIFA-style activation that Economic Development is having an exhibition in their offices from a Uruguayan artist that is all about fans. So that, along with an activation that he's doing with the Museum for Children, will all be there. We do have, someone from my office has been calling different restaurants so that we can share what all restaurants or bars, et cetera, in Coral Gables are planning to do so that the community knows that Coral Gables is the place to be.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, I appreciate it, especially if you can share it with us.

Communications Director Martha Pantin: I definitely will.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You're much better at this than I am.

Mayor Lago: So, in closing, I want to invite everyone, again, we're not going to have a meeting before 4th of July, correct? The next one is July the 7th.

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City Manager Iglesias: This is our last meeting.

Mayor Lago: Yes, so I want to invite everybody, obviously, to the Biltmore Hotel and to our celebrations for the 4th of July, 250 years of the greatest country in the world. Blessing to live in this country, and I want to thank everyone and ask them to please join. We're going to have an amazing festival and celebration in honor of this great country. May I have a motion?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll move.

Commissioner Castro: I'll second.

Mayor Lago: All in favor? Aye. Aye.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.