

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item D – Mayor’s Comments**  
**December 7, 2021**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Vince Lago**

**Vice Mayor Michael Mena**

**Commissioner Rhonda Anderson**

**Commissioner Jorge Fors**

**Commissioner Kirk Menendez**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Assistant City Attorney, Naomi Levi-Garcia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

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Agenda Item D [Start: 10:00 a.m.]

Mayor’s Comment

Mayor Lago: Before we move onto Public Comment, I’d like to take one thing out of order. I’d like to do the Mayor’s Comments, if I could. So, just a few things that I would like to discuss, but more importantly I’m going to take a personal point of privilege and I want to recognize our past Mayor, who is here today. Our past Mayor is not aware why we brought him here today. I can only imagine what story he was told to be here, but we’ll leave that up for another day, because we have a pretty long agenda today. But the Mayor has been a long friend and its my privilege to have the former Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli, grace us with his presence today. Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli is well known in our community, for not only serving on the Commission for many years, but also for being a renowned lawyer, Harvard lawyer, and leading in the banking industry. But I know him for a few other things. I know him as an art collector. I know him as a Renaissance man, a person who is interested in history. A person who has a voracious appetite for reading, especially

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when you talk about American history and different Presidents. But I know him also for being an avid orchid collector. And I was looking up today in preparation for the speech, and I wanted to find out, besides being a lawyer, Mayor, father, grandfather, what would he be? He would potentially be known as an orchidologist, just for those that are not aware. My father is a physician, and he is also an orchid fanatic. He has an orchid house just like the Mayor does. So now I will use that term to refer to him, not as Abuelo or Papi or Doctor, I'll refer to him as an orchidologist. So, our esteemed Mayor is an orchidologist, the fact of the day. During his tenure on the Commission, he spearheaded the Mayor's Innovation Council, brought art and culture in the City of Coral Gables, and was instrumental in development of the Coral Gables Museum, along with a litany of other projects. Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli has been involved in countless committees and boards in our community, such as the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, the South Florida Everglades Restoration Task Force and the University of Miami Citizens Advisory Board. Besides the committees and award the Mayor has received, which are countless, he has served our city on the Commission since 1985, which shows a level of commitment he has had to the city and all of its residents. And that level of commitment can only happen as a result of his family and his beautiful wife. They have paid the ultimate toll as a result of his commitment to the City of Coral Gables. So, I'd like to say thank you, not only are we honoring the Mayor today, but I'd like to thank his wife and his family for giving up of their Saturdays of their Sundays not seeing their father or their husband on long nights for years and years and years, because he had a vested interest and a dedication on behalf of this community. So, I want to thank you, Mr. Valdes-Fauli, thank you for your time, thank you for your commitment and we are grateful for you sharing your husband with the City of Coral Gables. Thank you for that.

[Applause]

Mayor Lago: I'm almost done. I'm almost done.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: No, no, Mr. Mayor, please, please. Things never change, don't worry.

[Laughter]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me correct something you said. Its an orchidologist in English and orchidiota in Spanish.

[Laughter]

Mayor Lago: Always the last word, a good lawyer, right. So, for demonstrating great leadership and commitment to our city as Mayor, its now my turn to present you with the Key to the City Beautiful. Thank you for your dedication to the city. But this is a long time coming. I got elected six months ago with your help and with my help and my fellow colleagues on the Commission and  
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many of you are here today, and I haven't forgotten that. You have been a staunch advocate and you've always been a sounding board and an opportunity for me to voice my opinions, voice some crazy ideas that came to fruition, but after six months we made a decision when we first started that I wanted to change things up a little bit, and I wanted to, not only obviously provide a Key and the Key is the same as any other elected official has, but we've taken a different position. We've made sure this Key, and this is why it took six months to get here, was made in the United States, and you are the first person to receive the Key that is under my administration. So, I want to say thank you and I want to apologize, obviously that its taken so long, but I wanted you to know that this Key was made in this great country that we are blessed to live in, and that this is the first opportunity that I have to give it to anyone. So, thank you for your commitment to the City of Coral Gables and its my honor to give this to you on behalf of the Commission.

[Applause]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Mr. Mayor, Commission, in the immortal words of the Lion King, "Akuna Matata."

[Laughter]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Peace be to you all. I'm deeply honored, deeply, deeply honored. I served the city for 17, 18, 19, years, I don't know how long, and I'm very proud of things that were accomplished during my terms. Lately, the Public Safety Building, before that Merrick Park, the Museum when my brother, who is now the President of the Museum is here, and the Youth Center, many, many other things. I asked the firefighters to stay because the most important thing that has ever happened to me in Coral Gables is that I enjoyed, I was proud and thankful to be in Coral Gables because of our Fire Rescue Department. Were not for their wonderful service, for their wonderful response, I would have lost a grandchild. I would have lost a grandchild who lives where you live, down south, and his heart stopped. They revived him. They took him to the Nicholas Hospital. They revived him two or three times on the way there. He arrived, he was plugged into a heart-lung machine, whatever it is, but I lived personally, deeply personally, not only enjoying the Youth Center or the trees or the Christmas tree, but my grandson is alive today because of our Fire Department.

[Applause]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's been a privilege serving the city. I have threatened and I'm thinking about running in 2041.

[Laughter]

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you for the honor. I'm deeply appreciative and thank you very, very much to all. It's been a privilege and a pleasure working with you all. Thank you.

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[Applause]

Mayor Lago: We have a 10 o'clock time certain and I want to make sure that we can address certain issues. I know that we have the Orange Bowl here and I have one last comment that I'd like to make in Mayor's Comments. Let me make that now. So, I want to talk a little bit about, I know its been a little bit of a point of contention, the Gondola Building, and I also want to touch on the issue of our successes on our second trip to Tallahassee, and I know that we have that queued up, and I'd like to talk a little bit about that and have Naomi step up here one second, if she would be so willing. I want to talk to you a little bit about – so here you have some photos where we met with Senator Jones. We were blessed to have three out of the five Commissioners and hopefully when we go again in late January, early February, we'll have during session. Here we have with Senator Pizzo. We met from both sides of the isle, and we had a very successful visit. It was again, we didn't have a moment's rest, to be honest with you. We even got up extremely early to have a Commission workout, which is something I'm very proud of. We were able to do it together, all of us, my colleagues came out. We met with both Senators, State Representatives. We met with DPE, FDOT. We have a meeting forthcoming with the Governor.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Correct.

Mayor Lago: The actual Governor in February. It was a very successful visit to Tallahassee. And one of the things we talked about besides the Legislative Agenda, which Naomi, again I want to give credit where credit is due, Naomi and Chelsea did an incredible job. It was flawless. We expanded on our priorities and Naomi will touch on that, on the last day to include the Gondola Building restoration, or a big portion of that. I want you to be aware that our colleagues, our elected colleagues in the state were very receptive to the issues with the Gondola Building, and we hope to bring that money down, and I hope that we'll bring it down and we'll bring down more than we've ever brought for the City of Coral Gables. Naomi, will you like to talk a little bit about the visit and some points that are important to the community.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: Sure. I would agree with you 100 percent, Mayor. I think we had a very successful visit. It was non-stop. We had meeting after meeting. Just a full 48 hours of advocating for the city. Our Gondola Building request which was submitted on the very last day to get a sponsorship is for \$750,000. Its being carried by Brian Avila. He is number two in the House. So, we have a very good chance of success. I am confident on that. And I think, overall, everybody was very receptive to the city's priorities, to our funding requests, and they were very impressed, I think, by three of our elected officials being in Tallahassee at the same time.

Mayor Lago: Naomi, thank you for your leadership and we are very grateful for everything that you did on the trip, along with Chelsea and we are looking forward to February being successful, now as we move from Committee Week to Session, and we solidify our position and hopefully we can bring home the bacon, which would be our largest catch ever. So, thank you again, and I look

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forward to the visit and I invite my colleagues. I know we had a great showing this time. I invite my colleagues to join us. It's a world wind trip. We are up and down 48 hours. It's a long commitment. I understand its time away from your family and time away from your businesses, but I think it was very successful and this is something that is going to really set us apart from other municipalities, and I will tell you this, every elected official we met with, Naomi, please vouch for this comment, they all said you are doing things like no other city is doing. You are up here twice. You are making your statement. We are explaining who we are, what we are all about, how we are being fiduciary on behalf of this community. How we are spending our money in a way that shows accountability; how we haven't raised taxes in ten years; how we have the second lowest millage rate. We talk about our credit history. We talk about our unfunded liabilities and at the state that really resonates, especially when you are asking for money to stay local. So, we are doing that, and we are really advocating, and I look forward to the trip again. And I want to thank my colleagues, Commissioner Fors and Commissioner Anderson for being there. They hit it out of the park, and we complemented each other very well. You have any comments or anything, you want to say anything?

Commissioner Fors: No further comments. I think it went even better. Every time we go it goes even better than the last time. I think that's a result of the repetition and consistency with which we have been driving in the message. And like the Mayor, I'm extremely optimistic about what we are going to accomplish this Session.

Commissioner Anderson: The preparation was evident. The work that you put in and each one of you put into this trip before we went. I commend you all for the hard work you've done.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Levi-Garcia: And if I may, I also wanted to get the opportunity to thank each and every one of you, especially the Mayor for leading this charge. The level of engagement this year leading up to Session has been unprecedented, in my experience. I know I haven't been doing this that long, but it's making my job a lot easier to have the elected their carrying the message. So, thank you, each of you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for your hard work and we look forward to the first week in February. Thank you. I had two items, D-1 and D-2; those will be deferred to the next Commission meeting of the Mayor's Comments. And I have one last item that I'd like to touch. This is something that I talked about, that I thought about, not talked about, excuse me, that I thought about not including in the Mayor's Comments, because I didn't want to give it any more credence and I didn't want to give it any more oxygen, but I've been left with no other choice. I want to address some misinformation that has recently surfaced on change.org petition regarding the demolition of Coral Gables Senior High School. I would like to make it clear that no one at the City of Coral Gables has had any conversations with anyone at the School Board, with Mr. Ruiz, and we are not in favor

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of a stadium project at that location. In addition, a stadium is not compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods and Coral Gables Senior High School is a community institution, which we value immensely. This property belongs to Miami-Dade County Schools. Let me repeat that again just to make sure we memorialize that. This property belongs to Miami-Dade County Public Schools. It does not belong to the City of Coral Gables. This proposal is speculative and one we do not support. In fact, I recently learned about this proposal on Friday evening when I spoke with our School Board member Mari-Tere Rojas, who reached out to me inquiring about this news that she had heard. Although we strongly value our partnership with the University of Miami, there are many other locations to build a stadium, one that does not include Coral Gables Senior High School and is not in the City of Coral Gables. Our partnership with the University of Miami is critical to the future of the City of Coral Gables. I live in front of the University of Miami. I enjoy the amenities provided by the University of Miami, but no one, neither myself nor on this Commission, or the City Manager, or the School Board or anybody at the University of Miami has any knowledge of this speculative proposal. This is not the first time that misinformation circulates like wildfire. I highly suggest for the individuals that are creating these petitions to do the research and speak with community leadership before spreading any rumors. It is a disservice to the community. It is a disservice to our elderly community who call us worried, they are concerned, especially over the weekend. On Sunday, I must have fielded 10 or 15 phone calls, 25 or 30 e-mails, asking if we were considering demolishing Coral Gables Senior High School. That is ludicrous and reckless, and we should be more thoughtful, especially when we are dealing with people who are elderly and most of the people that contacted me were elderly and were immensely concerned about this. Some of them were emotionally distraught. So, with that being said, I hope to turn the page on this issue, and we concentrate at the business at hand, which is critically important and significant. Thank you. That's the end of Mayor's Comments.