

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item C – Public Comments**  
**March 8, 2022**  
**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**  
**Police Chief, Ed Hudak**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Marisa Chisena**  
**Maria Cruz**  
**Mark Trowbridge**  
**Sheryl Gold**

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Agenda Item C [Start: 9:30 a.m.]  
Public Comments

Mayor Lago: Moving onto Public Comment. Mr. Clerk, how many speakers do we have?

City Clerk Urquia: We have three speakers. The first speaker is Ms. Marisa Chisena.

Ms. Chisena: Good morning. Should we wait for Mr. Lago to come back?

Commissioner Fors: No. He stepped out to the bathroom, but you can continue without him. What are you here to discuss? – is it Biltmore Way, I’m assuming?

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Ms. Chisena: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: If you want you can also attempt to discuss it when the item comes up, which I think would be early, because its in the Mayor's comments, however, I'm not sure there will be public comment on that. So, if you would like the Mayor to be here, then maybe let somebody go in front of you.

Ms. Chisena: Sounds good. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: The next speaker is on Zoom is Ms. Maria Cruz.

Commissioner Fors: Although, I will say, even when you go to the bathroom you can usually hear the meeting anywhere, you're at. Ms. Cruz.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning. Good morning.

Commissioner Fors: Good morning.

Commissioner Anderson: Good morning.

Ms. Cruz: It's a beautiful day in the City of Coral Gables. But as you know, I'm always trying to make sure that we keep the promises we make to the people. And one of the promises that we will be transparent, that this city's goal is to be very transparent. I have become aware recently that we are beginning to make a very interesting practice, hiring practice a norm. I'm talking about direct hires. I'm not talking about direct hires of people that may or may not have a lot of impact in our lives. I'm talking about top management direct hires. I have researched it. I have requested documents and it seems that the practice follows this pattern. We sit on an opening for a long time, we do not publicize the opening. Sometimes we don't even have a job description of the opening, and lo and behold nobody applies for the opening, because nobody knows that its open, and we have a direct hire. I find it very difficult and let me tell you, let me stop a minute and tell you, I have absolutely no objection to the people that have been direct hired recently, maybe, because I don't know enough about them yet. But I have an issue with not advertising, not conducting interviews, not getting the word out, so that perhaps there are people some place else that would love to come and work in the City of Coral Gables. Our salaries are not really bad.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Cruz, we are having problems hearing you. We just lost your audio.

Ms. Cruz: I don't know what happened, because its all the way up.

Vice Mayor Mena: Ms. Cruz can you check.

Ms. Cruz: Yes, I just checked.

Mayor Lago: You're back on. Can you repeat what you said a couple seconds ago?  
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Ms. Cruz: I said that I probably do not have any objections to the people that have been hired recently, because I don't know enough about them. But I have a problem believing that the City of Coral Gables should not be advertising for good positions, high paying positions because nobody in the world, nobody in the United States of America, nobody from New Jersey, New York, any of those beautiful places in the winter would love to come down and work here. I have humongous concerns about the fact, and some of the concerns are based on previous hires, by the way, that we have been skirting the process, we have been sitting on the openings so that we can bring people that we already know. What is to say that there is somebody that we do not know, somebody that hasn't worked in this county, in this city, in this state that maybe the best thing that we could find. This is wrong. And by the way, when you request information, most of the information is so redacted that you have no idea how or why, since there were no interviews, no other applicants, I mean amazing. Amazing that we are not entitled to know that we are getting the best of the best. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, I'm going to have the Manager respond in regard to that issue. What's the issue Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquja: No, nothing, except that we were going to go to the next speaker.

Mayor Lago: I want to address this. This is important. So, her concern that we're following, we are not following our protocols in regard to the hiring process. Can you give a little bit of background on why that's not the case?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor. As you know, its very difficult to hire.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: And for instance, the Assistant City Manager, we have a headhunter looking for that position for the past seven months, and we did not have candidates that were acceptable. So, when a candidate appeared, we took action. We have been looking for a Building Director for a long time, and so candidates are far and few between. We are currently looking for a...[inaudible]...lack of acceptable candidates and the fact that, for instance the Assistant City Manager, we've had a headhunter for the past seven months, nationwide, by the way.

Mayor Lago: So, these positions are open, and we've gone out to market before to look for the most qualified individual. We haven't been able to find somebody and when we found somebody now, it's a handful of positions that are highly skilled where we are looking for the best candidate.

City Manager Iglesias: We actually do that. And we've had a lot of difficulty for hiring. So, there is only one candidate, it's the only candidate.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Mr. Manager. I appreciate it. Mr. Clerk, next individual.

City Clerk Urquja: The next speaker is Mr. Mark Trowbridge.  
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Mayor Lago: Mr. Trowbridge good morning.

Mr. Trowbridge: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the City Commission. I too want to offer our heartiest congratulations on International Women's Day. We look forward to honoring a number of our women later this month who are leaders in our community and across Greater Miami with our Business Woman of the Year Award. So that will take place on March 30<sup>th</sup>. So, Mr. Mayor and leaders, I just want to share with you a little bit about our Flags on Ponce Program. I know many of you know that our Chamber, along with the City of Coral Gables has really been the architect and the supporter of that program now for 30 years. This is our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, having done this all the way back in 1992; and the only other city that currently honors the flags of so many nations is Philadelphia. So, we have a lot to be proud of in Coral Gables, not only because of the numerous multinational companies that are here, but obviously having more than 20 trade and consular officers. The flags fly from December until about June. We do it during non-hurricane season so that they do not have to be put up and taken down in high winds or extreme weather. We have a number of consulates that are very proud sponsors and supporters of this program and fly flags from St. Lucia, Canada, Japan, Australia, Great Brittan, Monaco, Mexico, and Belize, many of those housed right here in the City Beautiful. And we have a number of businesses and members of ours, as well as residents who support the program. And so, if you haven't had a chance to get out and see the beautiful, colorful display of the flags up and down Ponce de Leon, they are more than about 50 flags that are currently being flown along that corridor. I do want to assure folks; we've had a few questions that have come to the Chamber. We do not fly the Russian flag. We have never flown the Russian flag, but much to the great support of our Mayor, we will be adding to this year's display the Ukrainian flags. So that is on order, and you'll have an opportunity to look and see that. We also fly a number of American flags, and you'll see those interspersed along with the flags of many nations. Again, the goal there is to represent Sister City countries, multinationals that are here doing business, our pride that our residents have in the heritage of their own culture and nation, and of course many business owners who represent countries all over the world. We are truly a global city. It was an original vision, obviously of George Merrick, that we are proud of these past 30 years where we've had an opportunity to continue to may ohmage through this wonderful part of our business community. So, Mr. Mayor, we look forward to that and I want to thank Peter Iglesias and the city, because they are our partner, they make sure the flags go up in a timely manner, and I want to thank all of our partners and sponsors for making sure that we have a chance to be part of something very, very special in the City Beautiful.

Mayor Lago: Mark, thank you for your staunch advocacy on behalf of the City of Coral Gables. Just so my colleagues are aware, so everybody's aware if you are interested, you can sponsor a flag, its \$150. Right now, you have four American flags, you can do multiple flags. When we started having this discussion about Ukraine, where certain residents called, I decided to sponsor with my business for \$150, and I also got an American flag, so we have five American flags. But I welcome everyone to support your own country from your origin, but also to support the United States and let's put up as many American flags as we possible can and show our pride and our democracy. So, I welcome you, and I ask you to please engage with Mark Trowbridge in the Chamber. It's a great opportunity to show our pride. Thank you, Mark. Mr. Clerk, anything else?

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City Clerk Urquia: Yes. The next speaker is Ms. Sheryl Gold.

Mayor Lago: Is that the end of our public comment?

City Clerk Urquia: It was but we had one more person who wanted to wait for you to return.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

City Clerk Urquia: So, the next speaker is Ms. Sheryl Gold.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gold the floor is yours.

Ms. Gold: Good morning, Mayor and Commissioners. I'm a little confused right now about the public comments for today. I was planning to speak for D-3, which is under the Mayor's Comments and F-3 later. So, can you confirm. I don't really want to speak now, but Commissioner Fors seem to question whether there would be public comment under the Mayor's Comment items. So could you let me know, because I much prefer speaking later.

Commissioner Fors: I only questioned it because the Mayor was not in the room and it's his prerogative whether he wants to permit comment during his Mayor Comments, so I didn't want to answer that question on his behalf, that's why I warned the first resident that I couldn't guarantee that there would be public comment during the Mayor's discussion of that topic. But now that he's back, he can clarify whether he's going to allow some comment during his comments.

Mayor Lago: Yes. I handed off the gavel for five minutes because I had to use the bathroom, I apologize, drank a little bit too much water and coffee this morning and Commissioner Fors was a good stand-in as always. We allow public comment, we instituted public comment and we allow public comment as much as we need under a desired timeframe of three minutes, in an opportunity to keep the meeting moving forward and to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to speak. So, you will be allowed to speak, if you don't want to speak now, you can speak on the items that are coming up in Mayor's Comments in a few moments.

Ms. Gold: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: My pleasure.

City Clerk Urquia: Ma'am would you like to speak now?

Mayor Lago: The floor is yours. Can we close the public comment section?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

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Ms. Chisena: Good morning, Mr. Lago, Commissioners.

Commissioner Fors: Did you want to wait until the item came up.

Ms. Chisena: Is it coming up because I have more commitments?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Ms. Chisena: Its difficult for me to take off the whole day.

Mayor Lago: What is your item that you want to talk about?

Ms. Chisena: Biltmore Way.

Mayor Lago: If I can run through my Mayor's comments really quickly, that's the first thing I'm going to take.

Ms. Chisena: Okay. I appreciate it.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Perfect. We'll close that off.