

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-9
August 27, 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
Deputy City Manager, Alberto Parjus

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item F-9 [3:58 p.m.]

Discussion regarding the vacancy in the Office of the Mayor
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-9.

Commissioner Fernandez: Discussion regarding the vacancy in the Mayor’s office. I know that there is a current vacancy in the Mayor’s office and I want to congratulate Gabby on her promotion to the Manager’s office. I know it was a well-earned promotion. The Commission currently has two Commission Aides. We’ve been operating on one and a part-timer, the four of us sharing, the four members of the Commission. The Mayor’s office has had two. I had been talking with Peter Iglesias about this. I had talked to the Manager about shrinking the size of personnel in that office going into next year’s budget. I think presents an opportunity. What I would like to do is freeze that position now while we have discussions going into the budget for next year, and whether one

City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024

member of the Commission needs two fulltime staffers versus the rest of us sharing two fulltime staffers.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. I'm going to give you some facts so that you can make a decision yourself and if you'd like to, you control the Commission, you control the Manager, and its perfectly fine. But I'm going to give you some facts so that everyone can understand the depth and the breath of the conversation. So, it's not just you have two, you have more than two, you have multiple members. You have two fulltime liaisons, you have one parttime liaison and one is proposed additional fulltime liaison in this budget. So, you have four people. Okay. The Manager, the Commission, the Mayor before me always had two people. There was a parttime position that was made fulltime. That's not a problem. You want to make it a parttime position, its perfectly fine, its just tough to find people. But let's discuss the issues at hand. Okay. This agenda item is yet another blatant attempt to obstruct the progress that I've been driving for our community. Its becoming a disturbing pattern with Commissioner Fernandez, who seems more intent on undermining my office than fulfilling his duties to the residents. We've seen this obstructionism before, whether it was the effort to remove the entrance feature in my office, the underhanded proposal to dissolve the Mayor's Council or the attempt to stop me from donating and installing a luxury clock on Miracle Mile in honor of our city's centennial which the Commission had already approved. Now they are targeting a critical budget position in my office. A role that is absolutely essential given the significant, and this is what I want people to understand, significant workload my team manages daily. To put this into perspective, I'm going to give you actual numbers so people can understand, to put this into perspective. We recently pulled IT data on the call volume for both the Commission and the Mayor's offices. So, I'm not even going to go one Commissioner versus another Commissioner. I'm going to go all four Commissioners versus the Mayor. Over the past 90 days, a slow season for my office, by the way, the entire Commission staff representing four elected officials received a total of 907 calls. This is all data from city staff. This is not from me. This is done by the city – 907 calls. In contrast, my office representing just one elected official handled 920 calls in the same period. Calls coming in, not even talking about calls we're putting out. So, I did four times with less. Okay. Additionally, email summary reports indicate that I received the most inbound and outbound emails compared to any other member of the Commission. Let me give you some facts. I have them here. This is also done professionally by staff, and I'll make it into the public record. My office handled almost 7,000 emails sent since January 1st. The total amount of emails received is 9,625, and before you say, oh yes, but that has to do probably with massive amounts of email lists that are sent out, sending to residents, that has nothing to do with constant contact. This is just emails in and out from my office, that's almost 18,000 sent since January. When you compare it to Mr. Fernandez, since January he sent out 812 emails, stark difference. Commissioner Menendez sent out 1,300; Commissioner Castro sent out 970, but the Vice Mayor sent out 6,200, she almost caught me, I had 7,000. However, data alone doesn't paint the entire picture. We must also consider the myriad of responsibilities my office

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

handles daily – programmed events, community programs we manage, consistent public outreach efforts, ribbon-cutting coordination, constituent services, like office hours and much, much more. Let’s not forget the amount of legislation that comes from my office. Managing the Mayor’s office are far greater as they should be, given the role the Mayor as the figurehead of the city. As the Mayor of a world-class city, my office is the engine behind an immense volume of work from handling resident concerns to managing actionable items that propel our community forward. I do not meddle in the internal affairs of your office, even though its clear the workload and responsibilities do not even compare. I expect and demand the same level of respect and professionalism when it comes to the way that we conduct business here in the city. You want to have your own assistant; you should do it. I recommend that. In addition to the points I’ve outlined, I must emphasize the significant amount of staff time and city resources that have been diverted to rebutting efforts aimed at undermining my leadership. The time spent countering misinformation and addressing these unnecessary distractions is not just frustrating, it’s a waste of valuable resources that could be better utilized in service to our residents. I strongly encourage you to consider the impact of these actions and make better use of our city staff by focusing our initiatives that truly benefit our community. If more time and energy were spent focusing on our residents, and working together to improve our city, great things could be accomplished. This city deserves leadership which prioritizes progress over petty politics. It’s time to stop these transparent attempts to derail the work that truly matters, advancing the interests of our residents and ensuring Coral Gables remains a beacon of excellence. If your goal is to remove the position from my office, I strongly encourage you to review your current structure. You presently have two fulltime liaisons, a parttime liaison and recently budgeted for another fulltime position, that’s four people.

Commissioner Castro: I don’t think that’s accurate.

Mayor Lago: Let me finish.

Commissioner Castro: You can ask the HR Director.

Mayor Lago: Let me just finish. If you let me finish, I promise I will finish and we can move on and you can correct me if you’d like, but the emails and the phone calls are correct. That’ the bottom line. And I’m going to make it a public record and you can look at it. Please keep in mind the position in my office has been budgeted for and has existed for years. We should not allow the city’s progress to be compromised by those who put personal agendas over the public good. Our residents deserve better, and I’m committed to ensuring that they receive nothing less. Once again, it seems this Commission has a majority, so at the end of the day, I can only put the facts on the record. Why are these multiple attempts to attack and dismantle my efforts. Why can’t we all focus on what is best for the city. Why can’t you instead of throwing stones, build a castle with those stones. You should be able to tell me right off the bat five pieces of legislation that you’ve written in the last year and-a-half that you’re proud of. I will tell you what I’m doing. I’m providing next

month a beautiful website that will have everything that I've done in the city, everything that I'm proud of, everything I've done philanthropically, everything that I've written, every piece of legislation from a resolution to an ordinance. Every board that I've served on. It will be my living resume online so people can look at it and say, what has he done and what has he failed to do. Once again, it seems the Commission is a majority, like I mentioned, and let's move on from this. I urge you to rise above this division and work together for the betterment of our community. My understanding is that there are four people in the Commission that I stated those positions. If I'm wrong, I ask for HR to correct me. By the way, on the record, Maia Cruz' statement before about how much time we waste, about how much we spent on the furniture, it wasn't \$14,000, here's the actual receipt, it was \$7,000, and it went through permitting, and it went through engineering, and it went through all historic. Here's the fee.

Commissioner Fernandez: There was a public records request that was released which showed \$14,000, that was the public records request that was released by staff, \$14,000.

Commissioner Castro: That's including installation, everything.

Mayor Lago: My point is, Madam HR.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk, you have a copy of that, that you can show.

City Clerk Urquia: I can get it sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: No, no. Can you show us right now. Can you pull it up on the screen.

City Clerk Urquia: Give me a second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Alright. Because it was \$14,000.

Mayor Lago: I have a receipt right here for the amount.

HR Director: So currently, we have a Senior Commission Liaison, a regular fulltime Commission Liaison that was added during this fiscal year and a parttime Commission Liaison, so two full-timers and one part-timer.

Commissioner Castro: For four people.

Mayor Lago: If you want you can get a fourth person if you'd like, but if you look at the calls and you look at the emails, you can't compare the volume that I deal with in my office, you can't.

Commissioner Castro: Because we don't have enough people to help us. As far as for me, I feel like I'm a one-man team. There is so much more that I would be able to accomplish.

Mayor Lago: Ma'am. Ma'am, if I may, just to correct you. When we talk about emails these are my emails. These are my emails that I've written as a Commissioner, not my staff. I haven't pulled that yet because staff told me that it would be too much work to be able to pull all the emails since January. This is what I've done myself. This is what you've done. This is what Rhonda's done, Kirk and Ariel. These are your own emails. This is how much work you've produced in emails responding to residents and dealing with business issues. So, the bottom line is, its not other people, its not your staff's emails, this is what I do. This is clear. It's the people writing me and me sending a response to them to address their issues. Outside of my staff, that's completely different. Those are additional emails that are added to this, and we can look those up. I just felt bad for staff on Friday asking them to do this on such short notice.

Commissioner Castro: The reality of life is that when we're looking at a ratio of two for one and then two for four, it doesn't make sense. Now, if we have the capability of adding more people to ours, which I don't think we do, that would be a perfect solution. I wouldn't have a problem with you having three if we can go ahead and have twelve, I mean, that wouldn't be an issue.

Mayor Lago: If its such a big deal for you, I'm even willing to bring it down to a parttime person. I'm more than flexible, but the idea is, you can't hide by the fact that the numbers are the numbers. These are data from staff. This is data from staff. Its clear of what the phone calls are that are handled in my office. All of your phone calls added don't even added to the phone calls incoming. This is incoming phone calls to my office; and then the emails are clear as day. You have almost 7,000 emails that I've sent myself since January versus Ariel Fernandez 812. This is me. While the Vice Mayor is doing – I have to write emails. My staff has probably written double that if I look it up. That's just my work product.

Vice Mayor Anderson: One of the reasons I chose not to run for Mayor because when people want to come see someone and I see it here on Fridays because I'm at the opposite end of the hall, everybody wants to see the Mayor, we're secondary. Okay. I happen to get the trickle down because the Mayor happens to be down at the other end of the hall and they realize I'm here too. So, I'll get some of that volume because everybody wants to see the Mayor. You want to get projects done, you want to get your house redone, you have an issue, people come see the Mayor and that's just the reality of being in that position. You're the center of the bullseye, and you're the person that they want to see. So yes, its naturally and inherently always will have greater volume no matter who's in that office, because that's the position it is.

Mayor Lago: And I promise you and I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I promise you one day when I'm no longer here and one of you is the Mayor or maybe somebody else, you're going to hope, you're going to ask for an additional person and every staff member here can tell you, outside of the Manager, who doesn't meet with me, every single person here can tell you that I copy on emails, I respond at all hours of the day, doesn't matter what time it is, starting at 4:30 in the

morning I already start responding, and my staff does the same thing. Always trying to do everything in our power even when we have to tell them no, to make sure that we respond and we respond accordingly, because at a minimum, that's what the residents deserve, and that's the same thing that you do with your bandwidth, with your bandwidth. I'm not attacking anybody else. If you want to continue attacking me, just be careful when you attack me because the level of work speaks for itself, and the public record is here. Mr. Clerk, will you please put up the Mayor's office responsibilities so that everybody is clear. We do Town Halls two, three times a year, we meet with constituents every Friday.

Commissioner Fernandez: What happen to my request.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm not putting that up.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, who's putting that up because I made a request a few seconds ago and they were trying to put that up. It should have gone up first.

Mayor Lago: This is part of my presentation. Doesn't matter. At the end of the day, it is what it is.

Commissioner Fernandez: Oh, it really doesn't.

Mayor Lago: We'll get to see your thing now. You can prove me wrong that its \$14,000. All I know is that I have a receipt here for \$7,000, it doesn't matter, doesn't matter at the end of the day.

Commissioner Fernandez: It does matter because that's taxpayer dollars and if you're telling us that it was \$7,000 and there's a public records request showing its 14, how can we believe the numbers you are showing us now. Were you lying to us then or are you lying to us now.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner. Commissioner. Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: Simple.

Mayor Lago: Everything here was...

Commissioner Fernandez: One plus one is two.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, Commissioner relax. Listen, everything was documented, pictures were taken. This was required to be this way because of historic preservation. It was the only way to build, like the Manager, I don't fault the Manager for installing a faub in his office. He has a vestibule. Commissioner Menendez, Commissioner Castro has a vestibule, people can walk in, and they meet somebody. Commissioner Fernandez has to go through the Vice Mayor's office for a vestibule.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

Mayor Lago: Which is what we always did. I always kept your door locked. Let me finish.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. My door is unlocked.

Mayor Lago: But let me finish. Let me finish. I always kept that door locked and we always went through Commissioner Mena's office, and I was always the one over there. So, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. The point is that it was done for safety. The Police Chief was here, you can ask him, we had multiple incidents in our office with our staff where we had certain people walk in and they were, I want to be careful what I say, because at the end of the day, it was a very hostile situation in my office, not with me, with the individuals that work in my office, that's number one. Number two, I walked into my office, and I think the ACM was with me, the DCM was with me, and I walked in and there was a gentleman in my bathroom, right, there was a gentleman in my bathroom, and I asked him, sir, how can I help you? He says, oh, I just thought I could use this bathroom. So there has to be a moment where you just say, stop playing the pettiness and if you want the documents, we even have all the permits for that structure, its beyond that. Let me do my job as Mayor and when one of you become Mayor you can have the appropriate staff to ramp up and have the infrastructure to address your needs. That's the bottom line. That's it.

Commissioner Castro: Right now, one is 50 percent more than each of us has. So right now, just with one, eliminating the other, its still 50 percent more than what we have, which I think is more than appropriate given the fact that you have certain duties that are more than ours.

Mayor Lago: Okay. You know what, I'm not going to argue with you. I'm not even going to discuss it. Let's move on. Make your vote, just dissolve it.

Commissioner Fernandez: No. The Vice Mayor, according to you, almost as many email returns as you have. The last time the Vice Mayor said we didn't need to add staff in the Commission office because we had enough, and we're sharing, and she's been able to take on the same bandwidth as you.

Mayor Lago: Can I tell you why. Can I tell you why, because she's here every single day.

Commissioner Fernandez: As are some of us.

Mayor Lago: Again Commissioner, with all due respect, you can't tell me that you write 812 emails since January, you are averaging 60 emails a month, that's two emails a day.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I call the residents back. I talk to the residents.

Mayor Lago: So, do I.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't send them a five second email. I call them. I go visit them.

Mayor Lago: Me too.

Commissioner Fernandez: When they tell me I have an issue on my block. I don't say, oh, let me try to figure – no, I show up on their block and I try to see what the problem is.

Mayor Lago: I do too.

Commissioner Fernandez: I spend the time to go out there and talk to them. I don't have staff. I don't bother the Manager and staff and have them go out there at 5 o'clock in the morning.

Mayor Lago: The Manager will not allow me to meet with staff on the block anymore.

Commissioner Fernandez: Rightfully so because you've been using city resources to campaign. You just said it. You're preparing a website to talk about your accomplishments on this Commission as a candidate for office.

Mayor Lago: No, its not. I pay for it myself. You want to know why.

Commissioner Fernandez: So then...

Mayor Lago: I'm going to tell you why.

Commissioner Fernandez: You can announce it here.

Mayor Lago: Of course, I can because at the end of the day, I pay for it myself just like – you keep saying these things, you can't say this, you can't do that and then you are refuted. Madam City Attorney let's refute that. Am I allowed to talk about a website that I built myself and paid for myself that talks about all my accomplishments in the city? – of course I can.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, I don't know the details of it, so I don't know.

Mayor Lago: Its about city accomplishments, that's it.

City Attorney Suarez: You can talk about something you've done, certainly, but in terms of what is on there, I don't know, sir.

Mayor Lago: It's a city website that deals with city issues. Commissioner, at the end of the day, you control the city, you have the Manager, the Manager doesn't let me meet with staff, the Manager won't meet with me. You want to hide behind the fact that you don't produce work or legislation, at the end of the day its fine. Just take the employee, if that's what you want to do, but we've got a 4:30 time certain, make your move and let's roll.

Commissioner Fernandez: By the way, my intention was to end the other position which is making \$101,000 in next year's budget and this is my compromise because staff said we should not

terminate a position that's already in the budget and the person is still employed. I did not think that we should be spending \$160,000 on salaries for the Mayor's office.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, I've given you the facts.

Commissioner Fernandez: And I have too.

Mayor Lago: If you want to be responsive, if you want to be responsive and you want to provide the service, these positions were there from before I became Mayor, one was a fulltime, one was a parttime. At the end of the day, if you want to discuss about the issues its very, very simple. If you want to make a move and you want to terminate a position that I have that's open, that's perfectly fine. We move on.

Commissioner Fernandez: My motion is to freeze the position until we discuss it in the budget.

Mayor Lago: I never dabble in any of your efforts.

Commissioner Fernandez: You dabble in every effort.

Mayor Lago: No. I do not. No, I do not. You control...

City Manager Rojas: Can I just...

Mayor Lago: Just one second Mr. Manager, I've got to respond to that. There comes a point where you have to stop making excuses. You control the Commission, you control the Manager, you have complete and absolute power here in the city to do as you please, absolute power. Stop making excuses why you can't accomplish things. I've told you a thousand times, bring legislation forward, bring monumental game changing legislation, things that we've worked on here – solar, the Underline, legislation to transform our downtown, landscaping. Do great things. You don't have to dismantle what other people have done just to, I don't know, to hopefully lift yourself up. Its very clear. If you'd like to do it, if you want to freeze it, that's fine. I have a little bit more respect for employees. By the way, I don't want to tell how I was notified; I was notified 30 minutes before a budget hearing that one of my employees was being taken away. That to me was uncalled for. The DCM called me 30 minutes and seems that everybody knew about what was going on. I was the last one to find out.

City Manager Rojas: I'm sorry Commissioner. Two corrections. You're absolutely correct, I did not meet with you, and I don't do site visits with you, but I've never prevented any of the staff to go on your site visits.

Mayor Lago: May I address it. May I address it.

City Manager Rojas: I haven't finished.

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

Mayor Lago: But may I address that.

City Manager Rojas: No. I haven't finished.

Mayor Lago: But let me address that.

Commissioner Menendez: Let him finish.

Mayor Lago: I don't want to go to the next thing until I correct you. Madam City Attorney, did the Manager not say in front of you that he did not want me to meet with staff outside of City Hall unless he approved it and he was present, yes or no.

City Attorney Suarez: He wanted to be aware of when those meetings were happening Mayor. He said that he did have the authority to tell his staff not to meet with you, if that was what he was directing. He was saying he had that authority.

Mayor Lago: Again, it's the continued effort to undermine me and it's a level of insecurity when you should allow me and all the staff members here have met with me with residents and I always say the same thing, you can ask them all the same thing. Through the Manager, deal with it through the Manager, but let's bring this to light, through the Manager.

City Manager Rojas: Again, although I do not meet with you, and do site visits, I do allow my staff to do that. Number two is, on the promotion of the employee, you were advised that we were going to select her, and you were advised by the DCM to work, what was your schedule as to when you could release her to come to work for my office. And your response was, she can go on Monday, that was Thursday or Friday, on Monday. The third thing I'll say...

Mayor Lago: May I respond to that, may I, because I want to make it clear, I want to make it clear. First off, you have a person, why would I want somebody in my office who we trained for two years who is an amazing, amazing employee, working in my office for an individual who went and falsely claimed that I accosted them and that there was an exchange that was potentially violent in my office. When the ACM was there.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't think we should get involved. Criminal investigations should not be discussed here.

Mayor Lago: I'm not done yet. I'm not done yet. I'm not done yet. So, you're going to have a person who comes into my office that has been working with me for two years and is being brought down to an individual who won't meet with me, who won't sit down with me, who won't have a conversation with me, and you take the employee that works in my office and my answer is like very simple, if she is going to work for you – I found out about it almost two weeks after she had been interviewed, after she applied and she had been interviewed, and then she was leaving already, and a decision was made to hire her, and that was told to me by the DCM 30 minutes

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

before the budget hearing when we discussed the lowering of the millage rate, which did not happen. Am I right or wrong, Mr. DCM. You called me 30 minutes before that, and you said that you knew for a few days.

Vice Mayor Anderson: That was August 1st, right.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Deputy City Manager Parjus: Mr. Mayor, I called you as soon as she accepted the position, that's when I called you and told you. We had interviewed your staff, and she accepted the position, and I offered you the two weeks customary notice.

Mayor Lago: And I said she could start on Monday and then I said, let me find somebody to replace her, let me activate the position and let's start moving forward immediately to fill that position, because as you can tell by the workload, by the phone calls, by the emails, you add up the entire Commission, they still can't produce the amount of work that I produce.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mr. Manager, when did you advertise the position for the second position in the Mayor's office? August 1st, the Mayor was notified, when did you open that up to be filled?

City Manager Rojas: The position that we filled?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, the one upstairs.

City Manager Rojas: Raquel could probably answer that, I don't remember.

Mayor Lago: I want to mention that. We sent an email to the Manager, it took me three emails, three emails, and Mr. Fernandez, Commissioner Fernandez who harped about Peter Iglesias, Peter Iglesias, Peter Iglesias, the Manager did not respond to me until the third email, and then, and then, I wrote him an email clarifying with dates and times how he had not responded to me, asking me, are we going to activate this position. That is a public record, and you know it is and its correct. So, the bottom line is, imagine the Mayor of a city, who can't talk to the Manager, who the Manager doesn't respond to my email, and its perfectly fine. I work around it, and now you're trying to take an employee from me. Its okay. If that's what the Commission wants to accept, I'm fine with it, but let's stop playing the game of what we're doing here. It's pretty ridiculous.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mr. Manager, could you please provide us the date the position was opened up for advertising.

City Manager Rojas: I have to defer to Raquel, because honestly, I don't remember, but Raquel can tell you that the fact that I had not signed the requisition, did not stop the advertisement, because I said specifically, I don't want anything to slow the process down, go ahead and post it,

I will look at the requisition when I get an opportunity, but go ahead and post it and do the normal work.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, when was it posted?

HR Director: I'm asking for the specific date, but it was immediately after the position was accepted, the City Manager's position was accepted, it was immediately, within a day or two it was posted. We advertised it immediately.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So that was before August 1st?

HR Director: I don't know the specific date, but...

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm just asking before or after, because August 1st was the day that the Mayor not available.

Mayor Lago: Raquel, may I ask you a quick question, a simple question. As an HR professional and as an attorney, if you're going to hire somebody from somebody's else's other office, correct, let's say you're going to hire somebody from our City Attorney's office, you are going to hire Gus, right, for a position, isn't it a common courtesy if Gus applies for the position you call the director and say, listen, we are going to interview, we think they are very competent, they are very capable and just to make sure that everything is fine, if we give them the position, we're going to immediately move forward. Its just common courtesy as professionals that you offer that.

Commissioner Castro: Is that what we do?

Commissioner Menendez: What's the policy?

HR Director: So, there is no policy, right.

Mayor Lago: That's an excuse, there is no policy.

HR Director: There is no policy, but I would take the position that sometimes its on the employee to let their supervisor and their director know that they are applying for a different position. I think it's a little, it would be a little bit awkward for me to call Cristina before giving the position to Gus letting him know, letting her know that Gus is going to interview for that position.

Commissioner Menendez: Its premature.

HR Director: I think its more on the employee to advise their supervisor, but it's not...

Mayor Lago: Just because the Manager is quick to say thank you and I understand that, but the issue is, the Mayor writes you an email and says, are you going to move forward and open this position so we can start filling it. He doesn't respond till the third request. I literally write, third

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

request email, please can you fill this. It's a public record. Its an email. So, you can say thank you all you want, but at the end of the day, its obvious, you are trying to make it as hard as possible on me, and its okay, its fine. Listen, I'm an adult, I'm going to move forward. I'm going to keep working hard, we are going to still deliver for the residents, and we are going to keep moving forward. But don't make it seem as if you were trying to get out of the way immediately and open the position as quickly as possible, because you couldn't even answer an email that took three requests.

Commissioner Menendez: A comment. Raquel, what you said in terms of no policy. We have to look at the other side of the coin. If you are an employee in a department, let's say, and you apply for, I would imagine a promotion basically, an increase, but you don't get the position, most employees don't want that department to know that they were planning or trying to move out of the department, even though they have every right, because probably salary increase, greater responsibility. So, I understand if your department director you want to know, but most of the time employees feel uncomfortable prematurely announcing something that they don't know if they have or not. The other thing I just want to mention, I hope we can bring this in for a landing. I know we have a 4:30 time certain, but you know, we started out comparing sizes and it went down hill from there, so I hope we can sort of bring this in for a landing and move on.

HR Director: I do have a date. So, it was advertised...

Mayor Lago: You can always count on Commissioner Menendez to have a funny joke or a movie reference. I love it.

HR Director: It was advertised on August 1st through the 15th.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Do we have any applicants?

HR Director: We received over 100 applications, and we are in the process of, they were screened and the top 15 have been selected and we were in the process of scheduling interviews in the next week or so. That's where we are in the process, pending what happens today.

Mayor Lago: To be very clear. I don't even want to know who the 15 are. I want staff to select the 15. We were very clear in the email. I said, I don't care who those individuals are, along as they are competent, and you state that they are the best.

Commissioner Castro: Commissioner Fernandez, I share your same sentiment. Actually, this is something that I was discussing in some of my meetings in the City Manager's office. Surprisingly, you thought the same way, and I would be more than okay with the Mayor having two positions if we could at least have one for each, but we can't. Its not in the budget. It's not a possibility.

Vice Mayor Anderson: We've already added one before the budget.

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

Commissioner Castro: Yes, but we have two and-a-half for four people.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I understand. And I told you that what my needs were, okay. I've been here and I've been coming to this building for many, many years and I see the volume that the Mayor handles, not just this Mayor, but prior Mayors, the demands on a mayor's office are much greater. And so, I think rather than trying to take potshots at each other, and comparisons on email volume, etc. Yes, I respond to emails at 11:55 at night. I'm not up at 4:30 in the morning. I just can't handle that, but we all have different schedules. Let's try to move forward and I think it's been pretty well established that the demands of whoever is the Commander and Chief they are greater than those that are not. Everybody is going to go knock on the door of the Mayor's first. Everybody is going to want to hear from the Mayor first. So rather than trying to do this type of comparison back and forth, let's move forward. I think as a Commission we will accomplish more by working together.

Commissioner Fernandez: Its difficult when the Mayor has no intention of working together with anybody and he made that very clear. The rest of us, and I have to give you credit. You have worked with us every opportunity that you've had, and I appreciate that, but the Mayor has made it very clear and he goes out there and he tells people, tell Fernandez, Castro, and Menendez I'm going to destroy them. And then he has his PAC attack us, and then you find out that the information that the PAC is using has been provided by his staff, which is even more concerning.

Mayor Lago: That's completely and utterly, absolutely wrong.

Commissioner Fernandez: I hear you. I hear you. And all I'm asking for is freezing the position until we have a further discussion during the budget. So that's my motion.

Mayor Lago: It's the same and before we move on to your motion, it's the same thing that you do with Gables Insider, Political Cortadito and you do with Maria Cruz. You research and you research, and you research, and you dump things out there and you just try to destroy my reputation, and you continue to do it, and again at the end of the day, it is what it is, it is what it is. But the goal should be to put legislation forward, deliver on behalf of this community, and be able to say, this is my resume of accomplishments, not a resume of what I've destroyed.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Commissioner Fernandez, I'm going to ask you this, rise above it. Let's do what's good for the residents. Let's not try to peel back a position that has been demonstrated as needed for long before the Mayor became Mayor.

Commissioner Fernandez: I disagree. And I've spoken to former aides to former mayors, and they said the second position really wasn't necessary. It was something that was just added to the budget.

Mayor Lago: Let it go. Let it go. Let it go. Its not worth the argument. You have a motion, is there a second.

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

Commissioner Castro: I'll second that.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor before moving forward, I have members of the public requesting to speak on the item.

Mayor Lago: Perfect.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Like I told you today was going to be a good day and still could be a good day, because I have a solution. 2023 – because that's the only complete calendar year that I got. You all had, meaning the Commissioners had a Senior Commission Liaison, \$39,000, a little less than \$500, two of those and a part-timer, \$39,000. So, when you add that you can see the Mayor's office had a Chief of Staff, 2023. I don't have the new 2024, okay, because that's all I could get for the whole year. Chief of Staff – I wonder Chief of Staff. I know Miami has Chief of Staff, but how many people work in that office that there is a Chief of Staff for \$91,165.84, another Commission Liaison but an Administrative Assistant to the Mayor for \$52,404.86. When you add those two numbers its \$143,570.70. Okay. Now, he could have two assistants at the rate of the Senior Commissioner people, \$39,000 each. You could have two for 78. Actually, you could have three for a little less than what he's paying for one Chief and one Assistant to the Mayor. Easy. Easy. I don't believe in leaving people out, but I'm sure that we could find a position for the person, so she doesn't lose money. She's excellent, so she doesn't lose money that she could have the same salary some place else and the Mayor could have three people for the amount of money that he's spending now. See, I came up with a solution. Three people for the price of two. Okay. Or maybe two people and save money because two people will be \$78,000. I don't know the difference. I don't know why we have an Administrative Assistant for 52 when the Senior Commission Liaison is 39, but of course the Chief of Staff is a big problem, \$91,000 to manage the staff. You add one and one. I don't know. I don't understand and if anybody doubts this, I have the printout that I got through public records because I don't use fake names. I use Maria Cruz. When I ask for something, everybody knows what I ask for. I don't hide between fake names. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker Mr. Mayor is Jackson Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: Hi, sorry to take up your time. This has been quite a day here with all these big this up for months. First, I want to thank Mayor Lago for rescuing me from a nervous breakdown over what I thought was a general obligation bond, i.e., a tax increase, but he and the Finance Director, Ms. Gomez, explained that you all can do bonds inside the shop that don't affect taxpayers. So,

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

thank you Mayor Lago. You don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to get to my support for what your motion is, Commissioner Fernandez, and with regret. Let me just mention, Vince Lago and I are at the Alamo getting slaughter over the safe mobility hub and we have that bond, and nobody can shake it. I can say more, but I wanted to save time by criticizing. Mayor Lago, how can you be attacking people for trying to get free of developers by raising salaries for Commissioners. You've totally miscast this whole thing. You tried to say that they are greedy. When in fact, what they are trying to do is get independent of development money, so I really can't – you're getting the karma, okay, and so I think your staff positions should be eliminated.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: I just want to put on the record that the position that we're talking about is not a position that is filled. I completely disagree if it is to get rid of somebody that is currently here. I would 100 percent be against that. Right now, that position is vacant, and this would be a very easy and fast transition.

Mayor Lago: By the way, there were some comments that were made before by Ms. Cruz about payments. You are talking about a person who has been in the city for ten years, its called loyalty pay, and also with the previous City Manager and the HR Director will tell you, she was tasked with handling our issues during a significant transition to address Tallahassee. We went up there and received record amounts of appropriations. So it was not only the office, she was dealing with Tallahassee, she was dealing with other issues, and you are talking about a person who started at the bottom here in the city, working for all the elected officials and has worked her way up Another thing that's done here on this Commission that's never been done before and its probably one of the most distasteful things you can do, and I know that people who come from Miami Beach and the City of Miami have also told me that they've never seen anything quite like that is, we actually talk about employees on a Commission floor. If you want to talk about me and you want to talk about the Manager, the City Attorney and the City Clerk, I don't have a problem with that. That's perfectly fine. We are all adults, and we can do it, but when you start bringing up staff members and how much they make, you are ridiculing staff, and you are demoralizing staff, and at the end of the day, they are not to blame, they are just doing their job. But if you want to freeze the position, moving forward. Mr. Clerk, is there anybody else left to speak or no.

City Clerk Urquia: No, Mr. Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just want to recap one thing here. When we were in Tallahassee, the time that Chelsea was given that promotion, it was something that the entire Commission, including Commissioner Menendez supported. I think the bare minimum, bare minimum, not that I agree with freezing the position, based upon the volume of work that I historically have seen mayors engage in. Some mayors are more active than other mayors. You happen to be one of the more active ones is that, at the bare minimum there should be a parttime position there so that you can

*City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024*

transition into if you lose your full-timer, and you have someone that you can transition into. And I feel very bad for all these people that have put out 100 applications for this position to now, today, learned that this Commission is going to freeze it. It's been 27 days that that position was opened up and advertised by the City Manager's office, to now be advertising it as a non-existent position at this point. So, for the good and the will of the city and the residents to receive the services that they expect from this Commission, I think that we need to take the high road and do the right thing. The bare minimum have a parttime position in there in the interim.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. So, we have a motion and a second.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk, can you pull up the public records request to clear up those numbers.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir. So, Mrs. Maria Cruz had requested the cost for the wall of the Mayor's office. The invoices that were provided to her totaled \$14,701.59.

Mayor Lago: Let's talk about it.

City Clerk Urquia: I'll go ahead and put up the invoices. One that was provided to her was the actual IT cost for the installation of keycard equipment and then aside from that it's the cost for the actual build-out of the wall which was \$10,480.

Mayor Lago: So, let's talk about it. Here we go. So, if you'd like, you can have Peter Iglesias, I don't know if the DCM, were you here DCM? – no, you weren't here. Was anybody else's staff here also available. Were you here Mr. Diaz?

Public Works Director Diaz: I was here but...[off-mic]

Mayor Lago: I know that our previous historic director was here, so I can't ask Anna Pernas to discuss it. We tried everything in our power to do a simple glass enclosure. We needed to have a separation in the walls. We had people who were, like I mentioned before, we had people who were having conversations in the BOA meetings, they were using my bathroom, they were walking into my office. You can ask the Chief in regard to certain things that, in my opinion, safety issues that we had had with individuals who had shown up to my office and were dealing with my staff and they were nervous. We tried to do everything in our power and staff was very clear. Historic said, we need something that matches the city, that's why we made it to match the wood. We did a design, and it cannot touch at all or drill into the existing infrastructure. So, it had to be a piece of furniture that can be moved around. So, at the end of the day, all my colleagues have some sort of vestibule, or you walk in, and you see a receptionist or a secretary. You have that.

Commissioner Fernandez: I do not.

Mayor Lago: Yes, you do.
City Commission Meeting
August 27, 2024

Commissioner Fernandez: My office is at the top of the stairs and by the way, the question wasn't about the design or what it was. The question was you showed us an invoice for \$7,200, when the total was \$14,700.

Mayor Lago: Let me give you...

Commissioner Fernandez: But if you have a separate document then the Clerk's office doesn't have that as what was actually paid.

Mayor Lago: This is what I have, \$7,000. I'm going to leave you with this. Concentrate on building. Your resume is full of destruction. Alright. We have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: Commissioner, do you mind repeating the motion you made.

Commissioner Fernandez: The motion is to freeze the position until we have the budget discussion. We are talking about potentially freezing positions to use money for City Hall. I think this is a position that is currently open that could be frozen and eliminated for next year that we were not taking away an implication from solid waste or other areas that I don't believe should be impacted.

Commissioner Menendez: That would be about 30 days.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right. So, its basically until the budget is complete. We may decide to fund the position in the budget, but I want to freeze it now. I don't want to put those people through an interview process if the position is eliminated this coming budget.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, I'd like to make a public record, all the emails, all the phone calls, what I said today, so that people who want to, obviously want to understand a little bit more what the responsibilities of the Mayor's office is and what it entails and it's a clear public record, if anybody makes a public records request. Thank you.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No

Commissioner Castro: Yes

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: No

Mayor Lago: As a matter of fact, you know what, it's so absurd that I feel I'm going to vote yes, that's how absurd this is. This is the circus that we've become, and I will actually join the circus and ask my colleague, the Vice Mayor to join the circus with me. Vote yes on this.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Sure. I vote yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes. Its unanimous. So, the circus continues.