

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item C – Public Comment
January 10, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jim Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Agenda Item C [9:27 a.m.]
Public Comment

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk moving onto Public Comments.

City Clerk Urquia: We have one public comment Mr. Mayor, its from Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, good morning, the floor is yours. By the way, if I may, just very briefly. I'd like to make sure that I continue to remind the residents and the business owners and the non-residents that we formulated public comments so people can join us and engage with the Commission and along with all the employees. If you'd like to make a comment about one thing or another that deals with the city and that's pertinent to the city, please take this time to come and speak up. We've afforded the ability of anyone to not only speak in person, but also speak via Zoom, you can send in an e-mail, you can send us to the Clerk, whatever you'd like. Just want to make sure that everybody understands that this time for one hour is afforded to the public to come and let their voices be heard.

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Ms. Cruz: Well, good morning and Happy New Year. By the way Mayor, remember its Mrs. Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Mrs. Cruz, I apologize.

Ms. Cruz: Emilio gets upset because you know, its going to be 55 years. He wants to get some credit.

Mayor Lago: Some attention.

Ms. Cruz: Alright. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: Thought you had moved out of the city for a second there. You weren't giving us your address.

Ms. Cruz: Oh, no, no, no. I want to follow the rules and I know for some people its important to know how long we've been here. Well, we bought our house in 1976 and been there ever since, across from St. Augustin's. So, anybody who wants to find me that's where we are. You've all given me a lot of time to think. You know, this pause, this time that we were off, I had time to think and actually, coming in this morning, I was debating whether what I was going to bring up, and then I parked on Biltmore Way. And I said to myself, I'm so glad that Emilio never wants to come because he wanted to come it would be a very difficult for him to make it here. I don't know how many of you have taken the time to see that we still have our front door blocked. We cannot come in through the front door. I'm sure that there are many good reasons, but I don't think – I think the time has come to open the front door. I imagine having brought Emilio with me this morning, parking on Biltmore Way, following the sign to the ramp, going all the way past the building to get to the ramp. Then I had choices, I could either go in the back, go around the building coming the back way, or I could go the other way; go around the building, past the little parking space that I could have parked if there was parking, but usually there is no parking there; go around the back of the building to come in. Now, some people come in wheelchairs, I'm sure. Emilio uses a walker. Its very hard. The distance is very hard for somebody who has difficulty walking to get to the front of this building to go in. I understand reasons. We went through a pandemic. I know that we have safety issues. The same way we can have the security guard in the back, we could have the security person in the front. And I also realized something. All the notices are posted by the front door, so the people that come in this building do not see the notices there, okay. So, there are several issues and the reason that I'm here again is to ask you all, the elected people, the appointed people, the people in charge, to direct the staff to open the front door of this building. This building belongs to the people, and we should be able to access through the front door. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Manager, very briefly. We've talked about it before in the past in regard to accessibility issues, safety here in City Hall. What is your concern as I see other City Halls implementing even further restrictions in regard to metal detectors and actual police.

City Manager Iglesias: Its something, Mayor, that I'm working with Chief Hudak on, and we'll be implementing something here. Right now, what that does is it funnels everybody through the guard

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and that's the reason for that, for a safety perspective. However, Chief Hudak and I are formulating a plan for City Hall.

Mayor Lago: Because this is not an issue anymore about Covid, and I've actually heard from several employees who are actually concerned; concerned about people coming in and out of the building and not having potentially further safety protocols in place. Again, when you look at newer buildings, everybody is funneled through one entrance and one exit, which is again, an opportunity to provide further safety. So, I understand what Ms. Cruz is saying, but I'm not 100 percent on board with all those comments, because I want to make sure that we don't compromise; and I've had incidents in my own office, my own office where people have walked into my office while I'm in a meeting, where people have walked in and addressed my staff where my staff has felt uncomfortable. You know about this. We've talked about it before on multiple occasions, and I've talked to other staff members in this building who have told me that, again, there are no checks; there are no checks in regard to the amount of entrances and exits throughout the City Hall. While I understand her comments, I think we need to really look at it in a way that, if we're going to implement one way in and one way out, metal detectors or we've got to figure something out because when the employees are telling me that they feel a little uncomfortable about who's walking in, I think we need to address it.

City Manager Iglesias: We've already implemented a number of issues that I would rather not discuss.

Mayor Lago: I know.

City Manager Iglesias: However, we still have more things to come.

Mayor Lago: But that's my point. I want people to know that we're addressing it and we are looking at it and this is not a Covid issue, because trust me, you don't see anybody wearing masks, there are no barriers here. This is not an issue about Covid.

City Manager Iglesias: That's correct Mayor.

Commissioner Cason: Is there any problem of putting the notices that are on the front door, on the door that's open now?

City Manager Iglesias: We'll be taking a look at that Mayor, yes, but we've already implemented a number of things that I would rather not discuss now, but we have further things to implement that I'm working with the Chief on, and we can certainly do that. We need to formulate the final plan and implement that based on all those issues.

Commissioner Anderson: Just a quick comment. As far as accessibility is concerned and the distance people have to go, I think it would go a long way if we can put some additional signage as to where the accessibility route is and if we do need additional handicap spots based upon demand, we can put them closer to where the existing ramp is, because I know its very difficult

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for some folks to walk any appreciable distance. my husband is one of them, so its near and dear to my heart, okay.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, understood.

Commissioner Menendez: To chime in. Safety of our employees, the safety of everyone here is, like you said, Mayor, is a priority. Hopefully, if we do implement some changes, maybe we can on the days that we have Commission meeting, provide the opportunity to have access through both doors, not on a daily basis, but when we have Commission meetings so that as Mrs. Cruz said, those that want to speak, those that want to be in attendance have an easier way, but obviously not cutting back on any safety protocols, just focusing on Commission meeting days.

City Manager Iglesias: We also, by the way, have a bell at the front door that somebody who needs assistance can ring the bell and we'll be happy to open the door and let them in.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Are there any other further comments?

City Clerk Urquia: No sir.