

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-6
May 23, 2023
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, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

HR Director, Raquel Elejabarrieta

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item G-6 [5:10 p.m.]
Discussion regarding the Evergreen Compensation Study.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Castro)

Mayor Lago: We'll move onto G-6, Commissioner Castro, Evergreen Compensation Study.

Commissioner Castro: Yes. I wanted to go ahead and talk about more than just numbers, page 3-2, Raquel. As far as job titles and job duties. You have it in front of you.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: I do have it in front of me, 3-2. So, I think what Commissioner Castro is referring to, during the compensation study the Evergreen folks had various focus groups with the employees and during those focus groups, our employees said many positive things about the city, but also expressed some concerns about the city. So, I think its Chapter 3 is what you're referring to, Chapter 3.

Commissioner Castro: Correct.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: So just for clarification, the compensation study did not look at that. The compensation study was really looking just at job descriptions and salaries. But to that point, can I read it, just so that everyone knows.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely, yes.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: You are referring to Section 3-1, and again, this is general feedback that the Evergreen folks received from our employees. They probably sat with about 97 of our employees in 12 different focus groups. One of the things they said, and you are referring to Section 3-2, that says, job titles and job duties, sometimes job classifications and job descriptions did not encompass the many duties assigned to the employees. Most employees wear many hats and have taken on the responsibilities of vacant positions. So that actually was one of the few things that was addressed by the Comp Study, the job descriptions have been updated. I believe about ten job titles have been updated.

Commissioner Castro: After talking to unions, I think one of the things that we could improve in is that when we offer a promotion, we need to go ahead, not offer it for that specific employee, but post it so that the rest of the employees, even though they might not get it, know its available, that there's a way to escalate, right.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: All vacant job positions within the Teamsters Union, all of them are advertised and posted.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. That's not what I heard, but okay.

Commissioner Menendez: May I ask a question to piggyback on that? So, where is it posted, because I had an experience some years ago, before I was elected official, and those job opening in one of our apartments and there was a gentleman that's been working, basically temporary or parttime for 20 years there and that opportunity was there right in front of him, and when I and other reached out, are you aware that there's an opening in your very own apartment that you qualify for, and he said no, I didn't know about it. It's not now, maybe like five years ago, and the good thing is that person applied and actually got the job, but if somebody didn't pick up the phone and say hey, the opportunity of a lifetime is right before you, they would have missed it. I share the concerns. I want to make sure everybody who's already employed in the city knows in some form or fashion, other than a bulletin board in the lounge, here's a new opportunity that you should consider.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, why don't we have an e-mail sent to everybody in that department letting them know what opportunities are available.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: We currently do not do e-mails, but that's something that we can certainly do. A lot of our employees do not check their e-mails, but we can certainly, at least for

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those employees that check their e-mails, we do have a lot of employees that work outside, they are not office employees and don't regularly check their e-mails. So, we can certainly do that. They are posted on our website continuously; all our vacancies are posted on our website and the closing date. So, we post them at least anywhere between 7 days minimum to depending on the position to 30 days. But we can certainly look into sending mass e-mails each time there's a new posting.

Mayor Lago: Will you do me a favor, Madam Director, will you send to my colleagues' examples of previous postings, so they can see that they are posted and that they are readily available.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Will do.

Mayor Lago: And that, with all due respect to the employees, they have to check once in a while in regard to openings. They have to take it upon themselves to look to see what's available in the city.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: I will.

Mayor Lago: It is posted.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: It is.

Mayor Lago: And by the way, the city wants to, at least since I've been here, city wants to have the best, most qualified people in positions so that they can serve the residents of the city. The last thing I want is to have bad employees, in the sense of not bad employees, but employees that are not capable to handle a job that's a favor for somebody else. You want the best of the best.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Correct. And we always try to promote them within, right, because they want that upward mobility and it also creates, it has a domino effect, right. If we promote from within it also creates maybe another possible promotion opportunity for another employee. So, we always try to promote from within when we can.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor, it's something that I can suggest. Instead of having every time there's a position posted, send out an e-mail, maybe you can just have a weekly e-mail on postings from that week and send it out to everybody and that's just easier for you.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: That way it's once a week, everybody knows when to expect it, and they can check on a regular basis. Usually, postings are more than a week, correct.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Yes. We try to do at least three weeks, but it's usually between seven days and four weeks.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I think that's an excellent idea. Wish I had that when I was finishing up in law school and missed my cap and gown deadline because I didn't drive back up to Nova to look at my folder.

Commissioner Castro: What are we doing to retain our top talent?

HR Director Elejabarrieta: In terms of we'll be pursuing that compensation study that was implemented in April. So now we believe that we are fairly compensating all of our employees. We have tuition reimbursement, we have a lot of benefits, we have a lot of educational opportunities. So, we do a lot of things to motivate our employees and keep them entertained, not entertained, interested in the job and hopefully loyal to the city and continue to work for the city. So, I think we provide an overall very good employment atmosphere when it comes to their offices, the supplies. We give them all the tools they need, all the education that they need, any certificates that they need. We do provide for all of that, and we believe that they are fairly compensated as well. So, I think we do a really good job in retaining our employees.

Commissioner Menendez: I have a question in terms of the little – I remember some years ago, do employees get discounts of tennis or golf. What are the little...

HR Director Elejabarrieta: I don't know the specifics. It's posted on our website and in our collective bargaining agreement.

Commissioner Menendez: Fred is coming in through the door, I can see him. I knew it.

Parks & Rec Director Couceyro: There are some benefits where there's golf, tennis and use of Venetian Pool, which is usually for the employee, their spouse, and any dependents under the age of 18, and there's also a 25 percent discount at the Youth Center, more or less giving them resident rates.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Merit pay, I think was one of the ones on a separate page, yes, on the next page, merit pay. You want to go ahead and read that one.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: I'm not sure which one you are referring to?

Commissioner Castro: The following page, merit pay.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Oh, merit pay, I'm sorry. So just so that everyone knows where we're reading, page 33, under merit pay. It says, currently everyone who at least meets expectations on their performance evaluations receives the same percentage of merit pay. There is no incentive for employees to exceed expectations. Staff members voiced concerns about this and requested a change in policy in order to motivate employees.

Commissioner Castro: How do we feel about that? I mean, I believe if we maybe we would start employee evaluations, but employee evaluations telling employees what they are doing correctly and what they are doing wrong, and if they are exceeding their goals or their job, to have an incentive, to have reinforcer, to get a little more something to promote high performance.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: So, we do conduct performance evaluations on a yearly basis. All employees are evaluated in order to get a merit increase, at least for the Teamsters and the excludeds, they need to get a 2.5 or above to receive a merit increase of 2 ½ percent unless they are topped out. In terms of any incentive for our exceptional employees, for the Teamsters, that's stuff that has to be negotiated, so we can certainly look at if we can incentivize employees to go above and beyond. We want all our employees to go above and beyond, right, and if they are going above and beyond and they are working outside of their classification there's provisions in their respective collective bargaining agreements and within the rules that also gives them economic incentive, not incentive, but does provide percentage increases if they are working above their category or above their pay. So, we do have those mechanisms in place. We can certainly continue to explore them going forward.

Commissioner Castro: It has also been brought up to my attention that certain employees would like more flexibility in their schedules. As I understand that not all positions have the availability. We should also try to incorporate hybrid rewards for overachievers, maybe a day every two weeks or whatever schedule fits the department.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: So, again, it gets very complicated, right, because we have office employees, we have code enforcement, parking, solid waste employees, so it's really hard to come up with a fit that would work for everyone. Not everyone can work from home for a day, right. We have a lot of employees that just cannot work from home, so it's something that we can certainly look at for the office employees. Our directive is that everyone, this is a city that we need to run, and we want everyone in the office as of right now.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely, but as a reward, as a very good, great job, and we're not talking about everyone. We are talking about one sort of person. Somebody who's an overachiever, somebody who really deserves it, right, not because you worked and it's part of your benefits, but because you really worked for it, and I know that every department is going to be different. Something that maybe we can keep in consideration.

HR Director Elejabarrieta: Will do.

Commissioner Castro: I think we're having two problems, and one is, compensation and the other one is management. Not everything is wages, it's a combination between atmosphere, work setting, quality of life, work life, and compensation. What is our employee retention right now, because I've heard in the past two weeks that more people are leaving.

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HR Director Elejabarrieta: I don't have the retention rates. I know that our turnover rate is about 12 percent, and our vacancy fluctuates around 7 percent right now. So, considering the fact that we've added 25 new positions in this budget year and our vacancy rate is less than 8 percent. I consider that to be above average. Our turnover rate did increase during the Covid years, but so did the turnover rate of the majority of definitely the public sector and the private sector. So, our turnover rate, when compared to other turnover rates, it increased but it did not increase more than other employers. Our turnover rate tends to be around ten percent, except for those three Covid years that they were a little bit higher than ten percent, and now we are trending down again.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. Do we have a program or how do we assure employees that they can raise issues of concern and there won't be any type of negative consequence or retaliation from a supervisor or director?

HR Director Elejabarrieta: So, they can always come to HR to make any complaints. We always encourage employees to go through their chain of command. Obviously, there is no retaliation. We do train employees on a yearly basis not to retaliate against employees. We do not have a history of retaliation of our employees. Our employees, I believe, feel that they can certainly go to their supervisor to make any complaints. If they do not feel comfortable with that supervisor, then they can go to that supervisor's supervisor and continue or they can go straight to HR and if its something that Human Resources can address, we will address it. If its something that needs to be addressed within the department, not all issues are addressed by HR. We don't get involved in the operational aspects and certain issues. We will refer them, or we will work with that supervisor, manager or director so that that issue is addressed.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. That's it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Did you want to say something Ms. Cabrera? You good. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you, Raquel. It's always a pleasure.