

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D
September 14, 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

Economic Development Director, Julian Perez

Public Speaker(s)

Michelle Collins

Agenda Item D [Start: 9:20 a.m.]

MAYOR'S COMMENTS

1. PRESENTATION: COMCAST RISE

Mayor Lago: Moving on to the Mayor's Comments, I have a very nice young lady who I had the pleasure of meeting, her name is Michelle Collins. I have two items on the agenda. The first one is a brief presentation from Michelle Collins from the Comcast Business who is on Zoom, and she will be presenting a brief presentation. I know that staff also wanted to potentially discuss this issue. It's a great opportunity for businesses and for our community in regard to grant opportunities for small businesses. So, I would like to have Michelle, Ms. Collins and Comcast for five to ten minutes as required to give us a little background in regard to this grant opportunity and do everything in our Copower to spread the word of this great opportunity and have the businesses in our community take advantage of this. Julian, how are you? Is Ms. Collins available?

City Clerk Urquia: She is on Zoom.

Michelle Collins: Good Morning everyone and thank you so much, Mayor Lago. Can you hear me, everybody?

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Collins: Alright, so good morning, my name is Michelle Collins, and I am with Comcast Business. I will be doing a brief presentation on our RISE initiative called "Comcast RISE". Next slide. Due to small businesses specifically black.... people of color businesses being impacted due to the pandemic, social, environmental and unrest, all those events, Comcast Business has dedicated a grant that was created specifically for them to provide sustainable, long-lasting change in our community. Next slide please. Here are the following eligibility requirements for the grant. You have to be at least 18 years old, and you have to be physically engaged in your business. Your business can have no more than 25 full-time employees and no more than 100 part-time employees, and your business has to be established for a minimum of a year to be eligible for the grant, and the business has to reside in Miami-Dade, in Dade Counties collectively. With the grant, what would be awarded is that each company that receives the grant, will receive \$10,000.00 each, in addition to that they will also receive complimentary telecommunications services in consulting media, creative production and a technology makeover as well as telecommunications services from Comcast RISE. Next slide please. The grant will officially open with applications starting on October 1st until October 14th and the winners will be announced on November 27th. It is truly an honor as a Comcast Business to have the grant coming to Miami this year. Six cities were selected, and Miami was one of the six cities selected. One hundred businesses will be awarded the grant in total and again it is \$10,000 each and I have provided additional information to find out more about the grant will be shared with you via a Zoom link, it will discuss the grant in more detail as well as additional eligibility requirements and thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about the initiative.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, thank you so much Michelle and as always, it is a pleasure to have you, So, what I would like to do is to have our staff come up to see how we can collaborate on this effort to really promote this initiative and hopefully bring some of those dollars here locally.

Julian Perez, Director – Economic Development: Good Morning Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. Julian Perez, Economic Development Director for the city. We have already undertaken several initiatives to get the information out to the business community, as well as the community in general. About, I would say about four weeks ago, we had a meeting with Ms. Collins where we went over the program and had a number of questions for her and requested information from her. About a week and a half ago, we sent out an email to all the applicants that submitted for the grant application, remember back last year, and that was about 160 individuals that we sent an email out with the information for them to prepare and be ready for the October 1st. Thereafter, we went ahead, and we put it on our ENews as well as the department's report that comes out every week. I have answered a number of emails regarding the program and at this point, what we are doing is we are waiting to see if any member of the business community needs any help with the application or if they have any further questions regarding the program itself. We feel that it is an excellent program, this is another program that shows how our business community, not only here in Coral Gables, but throughout South Florida. In the case of

Comcast, they have really stepped-up to the plate, you know, in very difficult times, and again, we are partners, and we will continue to assist them and continue to reach out to our community. Are there any questions at this time?

Mayor Lago: So, what I would like for the Commission, if possible, and Julian, thank you for when I introduced you to Ms. Collins, I appreciate your team running with this, this is important. I think it is a great opportunity to give, you know people in our community, especially minorities and women an opportunity to get these grants because I would love to see more opportunities in this capacity that Comcast is offering. Ms. Collins came here under her own fruition; she came to my office, and she offered this opportunity and I think we need to take advantage of it as much as possible. So...

Commissioner Anderson: Right. Is it possible to have that email forwarded to each of us so that we can help with the outreach?

Mr. Perez: Absolutely.

Mayor Lago: So, I am going to put this on my newsletter this month. I did it a month before, but I am going to put it on this month asking for businesses to, businesses especially minority owned businesses and women owned businesses to reach out and apply for the grants because it's again, it's just a great opportunity we need to take advantage of, and its significant dollars by the way, it is not, it's not peanuts, it's a lot of money.

Mr. Perez: It's not only the money, there is another component to it, and it's the technical assistance too, so that also very important to.

Mayor Lago: Mentorship, guidance.

Mr. Perez: Mentorship. The money is excellent, you know, but again we have to look at the long terms too, and in this case, you know all the other services that they are going to offer too, and that is also very, very important. I just may want to add since I have the opportunity to be here in front of you. This is not the only one that we track, we track a number of other programs, you know, whether it's through federal legislation or other avenues that... to make sure that we stay on top of all of these programs and that we pass on this information to our business community and also work very closely to with the Chambers, with the BID (Business Improvement District) and so forth. So, you know, we have been tracking at least everything that we can get a hold of that comes either from the federal, state or even the private sector.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Julian. I would ask my colleagues and staff to please spread the word. Send this out to as many people as you know and hopefully, we can tract a wide array of individuals who will engage... and I want to thank Ms. Collins for being here today and for her proactive approach in engaging with the city. Thank you.

2. CORAL GABLES COUNTRY CLUB.

Mayor Lago: Moving forward to my second item that I will be addressing under the Mayor's comments. This has to do with the Coral Gables County Club, and I want to read a very brief statement in regard to this issue. The termination of the lease with Coral Grand, the operators of the Coral Country Club was a point of discussion at my recent Townhall, and I would like to set the record straight since there have been many misrepresentations and falsehoods put forth by the current tenant. As you are aware in March of this year, the current tenant at the Coral Gables Country Club was notified that the city would renew their lease, would not renew their lease because they had been in default for failure to pay both base and percentage rent. It is important to note that this lease, did not have a Termination for Convenience clause that would allow the city to terminate the lease for the maintenance deficiencies, damages, and other issues that the city was found, has found on the property. Among these are the following: Unpermitted work, property damage not reported to the insurance, residents' complaints, failure to return deposits to non-profits and schools for events scheduled during COVID-19; additional for-profit companies registered at property without the city's authorization. The lease specifically includes a percentage rent provision based of gross revenues, and that is critically important to remember. The Manager is in the process of a five-year financial audit of the tenant's management of the County Club. This audit should take about one month. After numerous conversations with Coral Grand, which included their submittal of a March 2021 proposal, the tenant engaged legal counsel. In June of 2021, the city and the tenant's attorneys reached a settlement agreement to amicably conclude the tenant/landlord relationship effective in April of 2022. The default resulted in a settlement agreement between the city and the current operator which was drafted primarily by the tenant's legal counsel, and I would need everyone to please remember that. That was very eloquently stated by our City Attorney at my Thursday Townhall meeting in front of the tenant. Incidentally, the tenant was well represented by Victor Diaz, Esq of VM Diaz and Partners. Mr. Diaz is a well-respected and highly sort after attorney in this community. The suggestion that he allowed his clients to be coerced or misrepresented into signing the settlement agreement with the city is incomprehensible and simply not true. I would like to stress that this is a legally binding agreement reached by both parties. An agreement which was negotiated in good faith and one in which they had top legal representation, as I clearly stated. Additionally, I would like to assure neighbors that whatever path we move forward with, we will protect the special character of the neighborhood. We can't accept any use that would be intrusive and that as a refurbishment takes place, it will be phased in a way that does not disrupt health club members or events. I want to reiterate, we are not going to step in and completely remodel a facility taking it offline for a year or two, that is not going to happen. Please stop saying that publicly and scaring people who visit this facility. Number two, I and I speak for the Commission, will not allow for a 500-seat restaurant, a 400-seat restaurant, a 300-seat restaurant, stop saying that. Stop scaring residents, it is not appropriate. I will not allow for spillage of cars onto the neighborhood. As a person who lives next to the University of Miami, and I have mentioned it before on multiple occasions, where 15 years ago we had major issues with traffic and parking in the neighborhoods, I have faced that and now we don't have those issues because of the cooperation of the university, with our employees along with our executive team here at the city to find a solution. I give you my word, that we will not allow a massive intrusion of the

City Commission Meeting

September 28, 2021

Agenda Item D – Mayor's Comments

[Date]

neighborhood. You cannot build a parking garage in that structure, and we will not build a parking garage on that structure, stop telling people that that will also happen. To be able to find a new operator, the city held an RFP process which was advertised. Unfortunately, we only received one response. The only proposer, Barreto Hospitality was found to be non-responsive by our Procurement Division and the RFP was cancelled. Coral Grand could not participate since they cannot be selected as they have failed to perform under the terms of a previous contract with the city. While Coral Grand makes innuendoes regarding the one bidder, it is interesting to note that when they were selected more than 10 years ago, and I should note, before anyone on this Commission was ever elected, they were the only responsive bidder. Let's memorialize that. They were the only responsive bidder 10 years ago. What is happening now, the Manager is looking at all possible alternatives including having the Community Recreational Department access what it would take for the city to operate the Country Club if a suitable tenant is not found by April 2022, and I give you my word again, speaking on behalf of the Commission, it will be a family-run facility that will make you incredibly proud. The last thing I need, and the last thing that anyone on this Commission needs is more headaches dealing with residents who are unhappy with something in their own backyard. This is a neighborhood; this is not our Downtown. We clearly understand what the community wants, and I promise you that we will protect your neighborhood and it will be a family run organization where you will continue to have ice cream, where you will continue to buy pizza, where you will continue to enjoy yourselves as a family, but we must do what is correct, we must run a facility that will make you proud. As I have advised residents that have reached out to me, we will not be intimidated by misinformation. We will do what is correct and this Commission has many objectives. One is that we are fiduciaries on behalf of this community and the business community. So, understand that as we move forward, we want to work with you, we want to continue to respond to you, we want to continue to listen to the neighbors, but we will do what is correct and what is the benefit of the city as a whole. Thank you, and I appreciate it, and if any of my colleagues have any comments that they would like to say, they are always welcome. Commissioner Menendez.

Commissioner Menendez: Thank you, Mayor. As I walked into City Hall today, and I noticed that the weather has changed for the better, it is a clear sky and there is less humidity. I also realize unfortunately we are at a point here at the city that we should almost issue a flood watch. Flood watch because our community, our residents have been inundated with misinformation to the point where it's detrimental to the cohesion, to the well-being of our residents. It's dividing us, it's creating anger where there shouldn't be anger, where demands are being made instead of questions asked. I took my phone calculator this morning and tried to figure out what percentage of our community are the ones that are circulating this misinformation. I sort of calculated it, it's .005 percent. That .005 percent is impacting .995 percent of our residents and it's doing harm. Please don't tell your cardiologist, I am about to say this, but take everything with a grain of salt because quite honestly, sometimes we allow others to process, package, pre-package and sell us information that leaves a lot of important information out and we take it as the truth, and it is only half the truth. My colleagues, I am absolutely confident in them, the administration and staff to do what is right. I have had a lot of friends, people who have I known for 10, 20 even 50 years reach out to me with questions, not demands but questions, could you shed some light as to

City Commission Meeting

September 28, 2021

Agenda Item D – Mayor's Comments

[Date]

what is going on, shed some light as to the vision of the Country Club. Within a minute or two, there response is, “I knew it, I knew there was more to this”, and there is more to this and the Mayor eloquently explained a great many of the details that aren’t being shared with all of you, and it’s the truth. For those who have been around long enough you remember the 1970’s and 80’s, the Country Club was the go-to place in our community. It was a second home to a great many people. I remember friends and families going, I think it was Labor Day weekend to swimming races at the pool for kids and families. They wouldn’t go there for an hour; they would spend the whole the whole weekend there. That was there second home because it was not only a Country Club, but it was a community center. It was part of their lives, like the Youth Center is part of my life, and quite honestly the Country Club has been there for 100 years and it is going to be there for another 100 years, way past our lifetime and past our children’s lifetime, it is not going away, but our mission is to make sure that it stays or recaptures that essence, that second home that community center of our Coral Gables and we are not quite there yet, and the café, I have spoken to the City Manager, I am confident my colleagues have as well. The café is not going away, after school you can go get your gelato and your coffee and hang out with out with other parents while your kids run around on the front lawn. That’s not going away. The pool has always been the pool. It’s not going away. Though when the current tenant took over there were swimming lessons by an amazing company, an amazing group called Ocaquatics, one of the first actions taken by this management group was to take away the swimming lessons for the young kids, my kids were part of that.

Mayor Lago: And so, if I may Commissioner, my kids were also but instead of being able to do it in their own backyard, the had to drive all the way to Bird and 72nd in the warehouse to where that facility was moved. They couldn’t enjoy Ocaquatics in their own backyard which is Coral Gables.

Commissioner Menendez: Absolutely. And the gym, the gym isn’t going away, but I don’t think that the gym was part of the original Country Club, but it’s not going away and quite honestly, the city’s own Parks and Recreation Advisory Board I have been told, recently passed a resolution asking that the City of Coral Gables take over the Country Club because it too realizes that we need a community center. That doesn’t apply to me, by the way, though I did bring it to the Commission the last time.

Commissioner Anderson: It’s all your fault.

Commissioner Menendez: I take back that motion. So, you know, believe in the process, allow the process to play out, ask questions, do not allow others to control your emotions, thoughts, and your actions. We’re a community, we are one community and please, let’s work together to make sure that our County Club is something that our kids and our grandkids can enjoy for many, many years. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner. So, at the end of the day, I think we need to have that this Commission and this administration is going to do the right thing on behalf of the residents. My only priority, my only priority is the residents and the business community. It is not the

tenants. My priority is the residents and doing what's right by this community and the neighborhood. Does any of my colleagues have any other....

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Fors.

Commissioner Fors: Yes, if I can add. First of all, Mr. Mayor, I want to applaud you for putting that on the record.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Fors: We have taken the high road with this particular issue long enough because that's what we do in the City, we try to take the high road. Obviously, it got to a level where we had to include facts in our ENews and as well as a statement by the Mayor here today. Which encapsulates perfectly what's going on here. It's very simple, it's two completely distinct issues, I just want the public to know. Who runs the Country Club and what the city is going to do with it? What the city is going to do with the Country Club is exactly what the Mayor said. We are going to operate it and strive to operate it in a fashion for the highest benefit of our residents. Who runs the County Club is a completely different issue. What's happening here is that the person who the city has decided can no longer run the Country Club or has not run it in the fashion we deem fit, not even close, is attempting to get their foot back in the door by scaring the public about what the city plans to do. Parking garages, 500 tables, steak houses. These are things that come out of people's imagination. The second point I want to make, and I hope the public is listening to this and hearing the different voices that are speaking about it on both sides of it. This should not be mixed with Burger Bob's. Another tactic that I've seen, is the exploiting, exploiting of the love that the community has for Burger Bob's by an attempt to make Burger Bob and the question of the current tenant's operation of the Country Club the same issue. Two different issues, two different facilities, and when I see that happening, I look at it as an attempt to exploit the city's love for Burger Bob's. Finally, one thing I was going to mention a littler later on under the discussion points, is that I know we included a statement with the facts in our ENews. In the Mayor's statement today, I think you said it better than the statement we have been putting in our ENews, and what I would like to propose, is sending out a special bulletin via ENews, in other words an email dedicated, not buried, not where this issue is buried somewhere in the ENews, a special bulletin which specifically contains the substance of the facts we include in our ENews as expanded upon here today by the Mayor so that we can come back. A pretty high volume disseminating of letters and emails has been going on, misstating the facts, with at least a dedicated email which sets forth the facts as the Mayor did here today.

Mayor Lago: I think you perfectly stated it and I am all onboard and I would ask for the Manager to please proceed in that fashion.

City Manager Iglesias: We shall do so, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. If there are no other further comments by the Commission, I would like to move on with the agenda.

Vice Mayor Mena: I just want to commend you guys. All three of you have very protenant comments, and I don't really have a lot more to add because I agree wholeheartedly with what you guys said. Just to put a punctuation on it though, I might... the most upsetting thing about this is that I can't think of a worst way to persuade this Commission and this city that we should continue to partner with an entity than by going back on your word after having signed the settlement agreement and resolving the issues and then doing a complete 180.

Mayor Lago: By the way, if I may, Vice Mayor. Not only signing, and I want to put this on the record again, I want to reiterate it, it is not only signing the settlement agreement which would dissolve, it would terminate the current agreement that you have with the city in April of 2022, they helped write that.

Vice Mayor Mena: Right.

Mayor Lago: They drafted that with their own counsel and just the amount of misinformation, the steakhouse the parking garage, the fact that we are going to close The Green Café, it is like Commissioner Menendez said that's not the intent.

Commissioner Mena: This effectively has turned into a political campaign.

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Mena: That's what they have turned this into. They are just putting out whatever information they want, true or not, and I agree 100 percent with Commissioner Fors that perception is that when the, you know, outpouring of support for Burger Bob's came out, that they saw it as an opportunity to sort of piggyback off that and they basically have buyer's remorse, they had signed the settlement agreement. They wanted to know switch course months later, but we can't do that for all the reasons that everybody has stated, and I'll just for what it's worth I will reaffirm what my colleagues said that I am committed to maintaining the Country Club as a place that is suitable for this neighborhood and has the types of amenities that our residents want and particularly, I think the potential of the swimming amenity for kids in our community is something we are lacking, something we had before and something that I think would be a terrific addition to the city. So, I know we are going to work through this and know we are going to end up in a positive place. You know, I want to reassure residents that we have their best interest in mind like you said, and yeah, hopefully as we continue to put the actual facts out there, there are people that would come to see that we are trying to go about this the right way.

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to add a few more points and the Manager can correct me if I deviate from all the facts, but the city right now is spending 1.5 million dollars on a brand-new roof. We are going to be spending close to a million dollars on a new HVAC system.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Those are commitments by the city, those are not being done by the tenant, and also there used to be a restaurant in that facility, correct?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Which failed. So, people are saying it's the first time there is going to be a restaurant, there may not even be a restaurant, we may keep it the same way. Again, this is not going to be, and I have also heard from multiple people, well they say they want another Riviera; they want another Biltmore. That's farthest from the truth, that's not what we want. So, I think this is a great opportunity, you just heard from the Commission-As-A-Whole, talking about their concerns in regard to delivering a world class facility for its residents, what the residents want that is not intrusive to the neighborhood, and I will repeat it over and over and over again. So, let's move forward from this issue, let's be collaborative with the residents and from the business community, the people who enjoy that facility and from the neighbors and understand moving forward what we can expect in regard to our neighborhood facility.

Commissioner Anderson: I just have a couple final comments with regards to civility, and we have all received the emails, threats claiming that we are corrupt but the unified concept between each one of those emails we received is those people who haven't taken the time to learn the facts. We do have a civility code and I would urge residents to not make those threats, reach out and learn some facts and together we can reach a decision that is best for everyone in this community. I thank you Mayor for bringing this up.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Commissioner, I appreciate it. I thank all of you. Thanks to the Commission and staff.