

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
June 10, 2025
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 Richard D. Lara

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item F-5 [12:17 p.m.]

Update regarding City Hall
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item F-5 regarding City Hall. Mr. Manager, can you give us a brief synopsis of where we are in City Hall.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mr. Mayor. Currently, as far as the windows are concerned, we will be presenting it to the Historical Board now in June and bringing it back to the Commission at the meeting in July. The design for City Hall was a two-phased plan and we are trying to condense it into one-phased plan where we are looking at programming and schematic design as far as incorporating that into the building assessment, so we can get quickly into design/development and construction drawings and try to take a year or year-and-a-half off of the schedule. We are working – right now we just received bids this week on the west side of Minorca Garage where we are planning on building the offices for the Commission and the area that we were going to use is now part of the Tax Collectors area that was leased to them, so we are looking at going to a building on Ponce which is about a block away from City Hall for the City Attorney, City Clerk, and City Manager’s office. That move will be sometime at the end of the year, as soon as the Commission space is done, so we are trying to speed up that schedule. Looking at the overall

City Commission Meeting
June 10, 2025

structure, I think we have some issues in the building, especially where the water intrusion from the windows has occurred, issues away from the windows look good, so we plan on again, potentially moving out of City Hall probably sometime in January.

Mayor Lago: Let me ask you a question, Mr. Manager, and I want you to, like always be honest with me. Where were we when you got here in regard to the windows.

City Manager Iglesias: The windows – we have a mockup. I will be presenting it to the Historical Board; the Historic Board asked for an assessment on the windows. I don't think we should spend the money on the assessments, because the windows can be repaired. That's wood, I can tell you as an engineer, they can be repaired. The question is, these windows don't have the structural loading for wind, they can't take impact, and they have a huge water intrusion issue, which creates a deterioration along the perimeter of the building which is where the problem is, and also the humidity issues and so forth, that we've had in the building. If we can accelerate the schedule then the window issue could be a potential problem, because of the 18-month delivery, so we are working on that to accelerate everything to see if we can get the working drawings done as quickly as possible and incorporate everything into one.

Mayor Lago: The reason why I brought that up. We've been discussing this since I've been here. We want to bring this building back to its original splendor. We are going to have to make some tough decisions. We are never going to be perfect. We want to be the best we can be but let us not try to be perfect. Would I love to save these windows? – yes, but this Commission needs to move forward on this item. If we put these new windows on, we also save money on insurance, correct.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. They will be impact resistant.

Mayor Lago: So, there are benefits, and I saw the mockup. It looks amazing. Is it the wood, the original wood from 90 years ago? – no, its not, but we have to move forward. We have to harden this building, and we have to start working on this building. We may not, again, like I've said before, let's not let perfect be the enemy of good. Let's get to the finish line here. Let's get this project started. So, I'm not in favor of spending \$100,000 on another study. Remember one day we said, and I'm not belittling anybody, but how about the county, the county spends so much money on studies, before you know you look back and you've spent 10, 20, 30 million on studies. If you would have done it five years ago, it would have cost you the same amount of money you spent on studies. It's the story of our life. We do it to ourselves. Okay. We don't make decisions, because we see if we can find a better way, find a better way, find a better way. You are not going to find a better way. It's the windows or its impact. Spend the effort and the money on making sure this interior is meticulous, that we do something that stands the test of time for the next 40 years and we don't have to spend another dollar – we will have to spend another dollar on maintenance, but I want to be clear and careful because then they take my comments out of context. I'm ready to move forward. I would like for you to please sit down with my colleagues, have another conversation with them, tell them where we're at in detail, and in the next Commission meeting bring forward an action item on the windows. I don't have a problem if you go and you want to speak to certain members of the community, you want to have a sit-down conversation with them, you want to have a roundtable. Some of our most important historic preservationists, I

City Commission Meeting
June 10, 2025

don't have an issue with that. I think it's great. Look what we just did right now with the help of Fred and our friends for the Coral Gables Granada Golf Course, we finally are pushing that forward, finally getting it done. Is it the original design? – no, but something is better than having rickety shacks that are falling down. So, we've got to take some action, and people were ecstatic at that meeting, even the people who didn't like the design, but at least something is getting done. So, I would love at the next Commission meeting to have something to say, so we can give you, the DCM, the ACM, the entire team, Hermes, all the consultants a real push forward; push forward and say, we have for the next X amount of dollars that we have, let's release the windows, let's get started. By the way, my understanding is, and this is from when I've spoken with Glaze Contractors in my business, glass is going up five to ten percent, okay, that's what I've heard. Obviously, we are going to get a special discount as a result of the magnitude of the product and that we don't pay taxes, but glass is continuing to go up. I don't see it going down and maybe you can give us a report on that and see, look where we are on those numbers right now.

City Manager Iglesias: May I respond Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Of course. Yes. Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Thank you, Mayor. We were planning on bringing that to the July meeting.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect. I read your mind.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes. We spent a great deal of time on the windows. The idea was, this is wood, there are very small sections and we spent a great deal of time of getting a window that matches these windows as much as possible, therefore we went with Hope Windows, same windows used in Miami High, constructure steel, so its considerably stronger than aluminum and much stronger, of course, than wood with as-builts done of these windows to match these sections as close as possible. These windows are extremely expensive, over \$3 million dollars. We are negotiating that right now, and so we've spent about a year looking at different options and try to save as much money as possible and working with Hope. So, I think we're ready, we have a mockup ready. I think we're ready to go. By July, I want to relook at that contract from a phase one, phase two contract, to a one contract that we can incorporate certain phases of schematic design during the assessment period to move right into design/development and get the plans done as much as possible. We are negotiating all that now and we want to do a formal presentation in July and certainly after presenting it to the Historical Board.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Just to give you, not that you need the historical context, but also for some of the new colleagues, I've been talking to the Manager for years now about the windows and the limitations that we have and protecting this building with shutters, that they just cannot properly mount because we are going into porous rock and they'll just rip out of the building. So, I think it's important that we protect this building properly. The impact glass that we're talking about is

*City Commission Meeting
June 10, 2025*

clear and you can't really tell the difference. It's the same type of glass that's been used at the Biltmore Hotel and no one has complained that it doesn't look historic and genuine. So, I think it's really important that we protect the building properly going forward. Thank you for your efforts.

Mayor Lago: Sorry Vice Mayor, and I want to make a comment for the Commission, the Commission as-a-whole, I'm speaking for the Commission. This is not an easy decision. You are going to get the calls from the people that we get the calls from. This is not an easy one. We've got to move forward. We've got to move forward and it's a tough decision. It's a heart-wrenching situation, we want to save, we want to save, we want to save, but at the end of the day, we've got to move forward on this issue in benefit of the entire structure.

Commissioner Fernandez: Through the Mayor. It is a touch decision and if we want to save this building for generations to come, this is our only option. Realistically, we are going to end up in the same place in 15 or 20 years if we go through a restoration process of restoring the current windows, and we could have a hurricane in between, which just decimates the building, and we've lost our history. It is a touch decision. I think, Vice Mayor, 100 percent correct – the windows at the Biltmore look phenomenal. They look as if they are period. You're out there taking pictures at the Biltmore, you look at the old pictures, you can barely tell them apart, and I think that's what has been come up with during this process for here at City Hall, windows that look like they belong at City Hall back in the 1920s when it was built. So, I think this is a no-brainer for me. We need to move forward because we are in hurricane season already and we still don't have windows in. So, we need a solution, and we need it quick.

Commissioner Castro: Through the Mayor. City Hall is in the National Registry of Historic Places, so maybe when you come back, City Manager, I want to see if we can obtain a certificate or a letter stating that this change will not affect the integrity of the designation, if that's possible. I think that would be sufficient for me to go ahead and reply with all the phone calls I am going to get about historic-wise.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, I'm going to answer the question for you, if I may, with all due respect. Is the Biltmore on the National Registry of Historic Places?

City Manager Iglesias: Yes Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Okay. They did the same thing, pretty much answers it, but again, I think the letter is a good idea, but this is nothing new, we've done this before, I've done this before on properties that are on the National Historic Landmark. As you can see, the Biltmore is on the Landmark, at the end of the day, on that Registry and nothing happened to it. Yes sir.

City Manager Iglesias: May I respond, Mayor. Thank you, Mayor. We've done a tremendous amount of work on those windows to match these windows as much as possible. The windows on the Biltmore are wood, because the windows have been replaced already, these windows are steel to match these sections as closely as possible. We spent a great deal of time doing as-built and so forth, and the idea is to protect the envelope, the idea is to reenforce the building as much as we can from the interior. We can't touch the exterior because if we touch the limestone cladding will

*City Commission Meeting
June 10, 2025*

never replace it correctly. So, we are going to be working from the inside, strengthening the building as much as possible, to give the building a higher strength and be able to withstand a higher category hurricane. I'm not saying category 5, that's not feasible and not feasible for any building that we have out here, but the more you strengthen the building, statistically the more chance you have of survival, right, and this is what we're trying to do without working with the exterior. There are no values for anchoring into limestone, there are no structural values, so we put the shutters to try to keep the water out for low category hurricanes. And so, what these windows are going to do is that they are going to provide us with protection. It's also difficult to shutter this building. It takes about three days to do it, which is really more than a hurricane warning, hurricane watch, because they are 48 hours. So, it takes care of a lot of issues as far as protecting a building and helping the building survive from – we can see all the leakage that is taking place that the back stairs is one of the leakages from the window above. So, the interior of the building looks very good from what I've seen downstairs, but the perimeter where we have some of the issues and that's due to the fact that these windows are not effective, not only impact and structural load, but also water infiltration.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Anything further.