

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-5
October 14, 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 [Start: 1:09 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission adopting Mayor Lago's 2025-2027 Strategic Priorities Plan.
(Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to F-5.

City Attorney Suarez: Sorry Mayor. F-5 is the resolution of the City Commission adopting Mayor Lago's 2025 to 2027 strategic priorities plan.

Mayor Lago: So, this is pretty brief. We had conversations at the last few Commission meetings. You've seen as the Chair has come and spoken about all the great things that they're working on and how extensive the priorities, two priorities are. Again, it's not just, I may say, the Mayor's Council, but again, it's everyone's council. It's made up of incredible members of this community who are giving up all their time, their expertise, and really accomplishing things. Two years ago, we did the app, and now we're working on a few different things that I think are, that are very interesting. I welcome you to visit the Mayor's Council. Go during one of the meetings, engage in conversation, provide input. And I hope that all of you had the chance to read the amount of work

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that was put in. We took into consideration your requests. We sent you a memo asking for guidance on this. And I think it's a really interesting survey and opportunity to really hit some benchmarks here in the city, to really just continue improving the city and quality of life across the board. Mr. Clerk, do you have any public comment? Yes, Mr. Mayor.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. Let me start by saying I support this resolution, but I have a comment. Since I was one of the original members of the Mayor's Council, I know that the last time I was there was either early – the item that I'm going to discuss today was taken up when I was there. And I know that I left in 2023. So, it's at least two years, if not three. We discussed during the Mayor's Council minutes, and you can see it. We discussed putting AEDs in all parks and open spaces. For, I found it difficult to remember what it meant, so I looked it up. These are medical devices that are designed to analyze the heart rhythm and deliver electrical shocks if needed to keep the person from dying. It was presented to the Commission and the administration, and at that point, we thought it was going to cost \$400 each, simple. But then the administration wanted to do a pole, a light, a Wi-Fi, I don't know how many other things, and it became very, very expensive. But I've been looking around, and it doesn't have to be that expensive. These things give directions when if you have an emergency and somebody's having a heart attack, a sudden heart attack, and you press the thing, it tells you what to do. You don't need to be trained. It directs you. It's like when you call 911 like I've had to do, and the operator tells you, okay, do this, do this, do that, and you take care of that. And by the way, the shock does not happen unless it's necessary. The machine tells. If you're having an anxiety attack, it won't shock you. It has to be that you have a fibrillation issue. I, again, this is a matter of life and death. It's been proven that if you have that handy, if you have it where you are, you can keep people from dying. I think it's time for us to move on that. It's been three years, and we only have it in one park, Salvadore Park. The others are waiting for funding.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: All right, perfect. Do any of my colleagues have any comments? Yes, sir.

Commissioner Fernandez: All right, last time you talked about the possibility of maybe adding things to it. After going through it, I think the only thing that we've left out is the discussion that we've had about the garbage fee. And the efforts that we have made to reduce the garbage fee with an eventual goal of potentially finding ways to subsidize that with other revenue streams so that residents don't have to continue to pay a garbage fee. That would be my suggestion, to add that to the strategic plan. And you had talked about making it the Commission strategic plan. I would say let's call it the Mayor and Commission Strategic Plan. I think that this is something we can all get behind. I appreciate a lot of the work that has gone into doing this. This has been extensive work and I'm behind it.

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Mayor Lago: Good, anything else?

Vice Mayor Anderson: No. You included what I suggested last time, and I'm pleased. I think this is a great product.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. We've been working on it for years. Commissioner, anything you'd like to add to the good of the order?

Commissioner Lara: Yeah. The only thing is I think I would be supportive of leaving it as Mayor Lago's 2025-2027 Strategic Priorities Plan, given all the time and effort you've put on it.

Mayor Lago: What's the will of the Commission?

Commissioner Castro: I'll go ahead and second that if you move it, your amendment to it.

Mayor Lago: Which amendment to it?

Commissioner Fernandez: The adding the garbage fee.

Mayor Lago: I have no issues with the garbage fee at all. I think it's appropriate. Something that I started talking about since 2017, using the word I again. I think it's important to discuss that and we've made a lot of in-roads. As a matter of fact, I had breakfast yesterday with the Mayor of South Miami, continuing to have conversations about the issue. I've met with every single Commissioner, excuse me, with every single Mayor outside of having a public meeting that we had here in the city to continue to discuss this issue. I'm planning on a meeting with Commissioner Regalado and her team to discuss options. It's a little complicated as a result of right now of the property. So, I am 110 percent. I would love to see significant if not a complete reduction of green matter going into the waste stream. I think garbage fees are only going to continue to go up with the county. They continue to pass it through, making us the bad guy. I hate to say that. I love our friends at the county, but we are the ones that pass it on to the residents, except for the last few years where we have not, when we cut the garbage fee. So, at the end of the day, we're going to have a hard lesson. I remember, I can't give you the exact number, but I remember 12 years ago when I started on the Commission, I think our garbage fee was at half, not what it is half now, half of what it's supposed to be, which was, that's how much it's gone up in 12 years. And it's only going to continue to go up even more now as the billions of dollars that are going to be invested in the new Covanta facility. And also, the fact that we're hearing problems that, and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Manager and Mr. DCM, ACM, we're hearing now that landfills could be at capacity in five to seven years. Is that correct?

City Manager Iglesias: That is correct, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: That is correct. So, what does that mean? They're not going to buy new land to build a new landfill. I don't think anybody wants a landfill in their backyard. Look at Doral, and I side

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with Doral. What's going to end up happening is you're going to have to ship this garbage outside the state. So, I mean, again, that is a recipe for increased fees. Whether you like it or not, we're going to have to deal with this. We're going to have to find a way to find a solution to really finally, at least a green matter, at least a green matter should not be going into landfills and should not be going into any facility. It should be addressed with what I've been talking about since 2017, which is a public record already.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Mayor, I just wanted to state that the magnitude of sanitation, it's about a \$15.1 million cost. We currently subsidize \$8.9 million so that what's left over that we do not subsidize is \$6.2 million. So, it's a very large cost.

Mayor Lago: So, when you think about the green matter, you're talking about millions and millions of dollars just in green matter, only in green matter. So, I think it's something that we have to deal with. I know the Manager's dealing right now with Miami-Dade County. He's given us an update in regard to those negotiations, but we're going to have to take a real tough stand and make an investment for the future and find a solution. Madam Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Commissioner, I applaud the effort to bring the garbage fee down to zero, but there also needs to be some incentive for folks to do things that help bring the garbage fee down to zero. I've managed apartment units, and I know that if there's no hit on the pocketbook, there's no incentive for people to do things differently, such as recycling or putting the green matter to work and be made into reusable matter. And there was a day, and I heard this from one of our State Representatives, that the City of Hialeah used to give out the green matter as mulch for free, and they stopped doing it, because we know what happens. We have the push of the industry that says you must buy mulch in bags. We need to start leading the way, and we can do so. It's going to take us more than a year to get there, to have better infrastructure, more sustainable infrastructure. And I can tell you that about three, four years ago, when I spoke to folks dealing with garbage and waste in the northeastern part of the United States, the tipping fees then were \$75 a ton. Ours are, Mr. Manager, I think around, what?

City Manager Iglesias: 49, because that's for green matter. We are forced to go to a landfill for garbage, green matter is because we take it to Waste Management.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, we can significantly reduce the cost for our residents by dealing with the green matter. So, I think we need to look at a cost reduction aspect of it first and just keep in mind that sometimes we have to encourage behavior through a cost recognition. You know, I was going to wait until public comment, I mean, the discussion item at the end, because I've asked staff to bring us a report back on how many warnings have been given out on the dog waste bags, and

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I'm going to ask that to be put on the November, first November agenda, because yes, we're giving out warnings now, but we have to really be giving out warnings. I haven't seen any warnings being given out, but people are starting to reduce the amount of dog waste that they put in the trash pits. Little things like this. Come February, you know, pursuant to our united position, you know, the fines will start being handed out. You know, we'll move to the next stage, and warnings to those who hadn't had warnings before. But we do need to encourage people to do the right thing.

Mayor Lago: So, you're in accordance with the friendly amendment to add the garbage fee, the garbage discussion to the strategic plan?

Vice Mayor Anderson: We need to have a garbage discussion, yes. But you know, we need to have this holistic approach.

Commissioner Fernandez: And in the language would be along the lines of continue to work towards the elimination of the garbage fee by finding new ways to either address garbage, pick up the garbage, or subsidize the cost.

Vice Mayor Anderson: May I?

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Unfortunately, I don't think that that is going to reach the goal of reducing for the city garbage costs. And by reducing garbage costs for the city, we now increase the ability of the city to address other things such as sidewalks and road repaving and other things that need to be done that residents want to have done. We're always going to have people that are unwilling to do something in a more efficient fashion, such as the recycling. Okay, how do you encourage people to do it? Well, we're going to have to work on that, but it's not going to be at zero cost to the person that's not doing it properly. Just like the dog waste, we're going to have to develop a system where people pay for what they dump. We have to be more vigilant watching people dumping from elsewhere. We recently were able to catch a lawn person dumping an entire truckload of stuff in the swales. That's what's costing us so much. We have to find a way to avoid that. And the more we dump, the more there's going to be more dumping. So, we can do a cleaner system, a better system that provides that first class service, white glove service. I know it's done in Key Biscayne, okay. It's not going to come at no cost, but it actually will reduce the cost in the long run because you'll not be tipping as much. You're not going to be having the dumping on the streets.

City Manager Iglesias: Through the Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, thank you, Mayor. Garbage must be taken to the county by what we can handle on our own is recycling, which we do through Waste Management, and we keep our recycling to less than 10 percent contamination. Therefore, we have no tipping fees. And we take trash to Waste Management, which is just under \$50 a ton. Garbage, we are forced by state statute and by county bonds to take it to the county. We're charged with transfer fees just under \$90. So those costs are not going to go down. Those costs are going to go up. And that's why we are looking at our transfer site right now to do a potential site for trash or green matter. And that is a presentation that we provided to the City Commission. We're now looking at a site plan for that site.

Mayor Lago: Okay. So, we have an amendment to a strategic plan to add waste. Obviously, that will be evolving. So, I think that this is an organic document, ever evolving. It's been evolving for the last few years as we've met certain needs, as our needs have evolved. So, I welcome you all to attend the Mayor's Council meeting. I think it's an opportunity to be engaged and understand a little bit about what these residents are doing. They have some pretty interesting ideas. And we're talking about things that I think may astound certain people here in a positive way that they're looking to implement in regard to technology. So, anyone else? All right. Mr. Clerk, we have a motion and a second.

City Clerk Urquia: I'm sorry, Mr. Mayor, who made the motion?

Commissioner Fernandez: I did.

City Clerk Urquia: Okay, seconded by?

Commissioner Fernandez: Commissioner Castro.

City Clerk Urquia: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Lara: Need clarification. So, is the amendment only to add the portion regarding garbage fees? And what will the document be called? It remains the same?

Mayor Lago: The Mayor's Council Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Lara: Then yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

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