

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-9
March 28, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner James Cason

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez

City Manager, Peter Iglesias

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Lynne Blustein

Kayla Gomez

Agenda Item G-9 - [11:06 a.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager and the City Attorney to take the next steps, in accordance with Miami-Dade County requirements, in furtherance of annexation efforts for the areas known as Little Gables and High Pines/Ponce-Davis. (Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Let's move onto G-9. What I'd like to do, if we can on this item, can we hear public comments first, if possible.

City Attorney Suarez: Sir, which item right now?

Mayor Lago: G-9. Please read it into the record.

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*Agenda Item G-9 – Resolution directing the City Manager and City Attorney
To take the next steps with MDC requirements in furtherance of annexation efforts*

[Date]

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City Attorney Suarez: Mayor, G-9 is a Resolution of the City Commission directing the City Manager and the City Attorney to take the next steps, in accordance with Miami-Dade County requirements, in furtherance of annexation efforts for the areas known as Little Gables and High Pines/Ponce-Davis.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk, do we have any public comments?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes sir, we do, we have two members of the public requesting to speak on the item.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. Please welcome them and I close the public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: First speaker is Ms. Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, good morning.

Ms. Cruz: Good morning. This is Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, in residence since 1976. I'm looking at G-9, and I have some concerns, because we have heard concerns, spoken to people and getting phone calls about why are we pushing this, expediting this. Another reason, but I'm concerned about the resources. How can we get involved with something like this and I'm in favor of annexation, but in order to do that, you have to make sure that you have all the resources that you need for Fire, for Police, for Code Enforcement, for all the departments that will be affected when you bring more people in, more buildings in, more homes in, more services to be served. So, my question is, do we have the finances to do all this, and if we do, then we need to know and people would like to have this as a transparent process and a lot of the people that reside in the city would like to have some say, not only the people like to come and join us, and I favor that, but the people that live here would like to be able to have a say also on whether this should happen or not. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker Mr. Mayor is Lynne Blustein.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, thank you for being here.

Ms. Blustein: Good morning. I'm back. How are you all today?

Mayor Lago: Wonderful.

Ms. Blustein: I just want to make a few points. I'm not going to reiterate all the reasons I don't want to be annexed. I've been in Little Gables for 34 years and one of the main things that people have always said, and I'm quoting somebody who I don't know, this was a post that they made, us Little Gables residents – my family would have no need or interest to become Little Gables if the

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emergency situation that the county could resolve this. If the county could resolve this for us, Little Gables residents, my family would have no need or interest to become Coral Gables. I've just been informed that by the end of the year, 911 no matter where you are will go to a central bank of information and that Little Gables won't have a problem in the future of not getting service as quickly as they would like it, if everything is going through a central and not divided system, and with Miami trying to be noted as the new technology center of the United States, I would imagine that there are many people between the ages of 12 and 18 that can do that for you in a heartbeat. So, another thing is, somebody else posted, when the interest of profits override the rights of people you will create problems and destroy lives, ethics matter. And then somebody replied to that person, somebody who is very obsessed with exclamation points who says, I rightfully own a property that I work hard to legally obtain. So did I in 1989. So did I. And this person who is obsessed with exclamation points says, I have the opportunity to cash in zillion times what I paid for over 30 years ago. Okay.

Mayor Lago: Will you do us a favor, will you wrap it up in the next 30 seconds, please.

Ms. Blustein: Yes, I will. And this is, actually this is for you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Ms. Blustein: Okay. A year ago, or last year, in the Miami Herald, I'm quoting you in an article where you said concerning annexation, I quote, I don't want to wait anymore. Stop kicking the can down the curb. Stop looking for reasons not to do this. Let's do this. The last thing I want to say to you and I mean this sincerely. I am not a can that you kick down the curb. My home, my beloved sanctuary is not a can that you kick down the curb and neither is my neighborhood. We are not cans you kick down the curb, and I just want you to realize that, and there're a lot of people that agree with me. I'm the one that shows up and says these things and have people look at me and say things the way they do. I have new haters. I'm very excited.

Mayor Lago: That makes two of us.

Ms. Blustein: Well, I don't hate you.

Mayor Lago: I don't hate you either. I actually appreciate you for being here. It takes a lot of your time and we're grateful to have you here. So thank you for coming.

Ms. Blustein: I'm very dedicated to my friends and neighbors that live in my neighborhood. I'm here for them as well, and we're not cans to be kicked down the curb.

Mayor Lago: That was never my intention.

Ms. Blustein: You said it though.

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Mayor Lago: I'm not talking about the...can or the neighborhood, have a lot of value. What I'm talking about is excuses, that's the reason, we haven't proceeded. Its okay, but thank you though for being here, I appreciate it.

Ms. Blustein: Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. City Attorney.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have one more speaker on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Perfect.

City Clerk Urquia: Its Ms. Kayla ___ Gomez.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Gomez, good morning and welcome to the city.

Ms. Gomez: Thank you Mr. Mayor and Commissioners. I am joining you today to voice my support for annexation of Little Gables into the City Beautiful. I've been a resident here at 4321 S.W. 16th Street since 2010. My husband grew up in the Gables, my children attend school in the Gables, we're active participants in the community. We bought in Little Gables under the belief that eventually we would be annexed, and we have been actively trying to make that a reality. I'm very thankful, as are many of my neighbors. There's a very large group of residents who have, I know have been in contact with you and the rest of the Commission to make sure that you're aware of our support. Many of us are working fulltime jobs and so, coming and attending the meetings in person can be a challenge and so the Zoom option is much appreciated. Although there are local decenters, I want to make sure you understand that there is a majority of residents who desperately want Little Gables to become part of Coral Gables and we are here to support the city in any way and we look forward to joining the community as residents.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for joining us today on Zoom. I appreciate that. We have gotten many e-mails and phone calls and text messages from residents who are interested in annexation and those who oppose it also. That's a great part of this moment in the Commission. We can have discourse and talk about it. Madam City Attorney.

City Attorney Suarez: Mayor just one clarification. The previous resolution authorized an amount for engagement of professionals to assist with the due diligence. If the Commission does direct next steps, we ask that the motion and resolution include authorization for the City Manager and City Attorney to engage any additional professionals as currently authorized under the City Code as needed.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Are there any other further questions or any other discussion that needs to be had my colleagues?

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Commissioner Cason: This is a process. I remember we started this back in when I was Mayor in 2011. It's a long process. During this process, everybody is going to have a chance to voice their support or their opposition – the citizens of Coral Gables, the citizens of these areas that we're considering to annex. Miami-Dade County is going to have a chance to make a decision. This is a long process, lots of steps ahead of us. Its taking us a long time. What we're saying is, let's continue the process, the due diligence, find out all the information about the pros and the cons for the city and for everybody involved and we'll make a decision probably a year or two from now. Its not something that's going to happen tomorrow. Let's keep the process going. Let's find out what we need to find out and make the decision when the time comes.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner.

Commissioner Anderson: We recognized today Women's History Month and the fight for right for suffrage, the right to vote, it's a precious right that needs to be respected. So, as far as what my vote is here is not to vote no, its for the people to vote what they want to vote. So when you go to the ballot will be the time when you get to vote. So, I'll be in favor today.

Commissioner Menendez: To move in the next step of the process does not indicate one way or the other whether annexation will happen or it won't. For years people have said, we want more transparency in the process of how our local government works. This is transparency, this is the process. At the end of the day, like Commissioner Anderson, the people vote, we're just helping the process along so that we can get to the point where people do have a voice and do have a chance to vote. Mayor, if you don't mind, something was mentioned a little while ago, which I don't want – I need a clarification from Chief Hudak regarding 911, that was mentioned and maybe the Police Chief can clarify the statement.

Chief Hudak: I'm not sure what she was referring to as far as a centralized 911 center. We're our own 911 center. So this specific area is bordered by three jurisdictions; City of Miami, Coral Gables and Miami-Dade jurisdiction that it handles. The 911 systems that are coming online which we have currently in our system as well is, we'll know exactly where they are by geo-verified addresses on a cell phone, and I believe that technology is going to be throughout the county. That 911 call still depends on what tower it hits, whether it comes to us that its in there then we send it to Miami-Dade. If Miami gets it, they send it to Miami-Dade, and if Miami-Dade hits it, which has happened, in our city then they will transfer it to ours, but the 911 systems as we know, as far as I'm concerned, we are still going to handle our 911 calls in our Communications Center, and this would just include them as part of the total report that you all are considering.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Chief. Mr. Vice Mayor, anything?

Vice Mayor Mena: No, I just echo, I think what Commissioner Cason and Menendez said, which is, again, this is just a vote to commence the process really, it's the first step. I know there are people out there trying to spin this as an attempt to expedite things. The opposite of expediting is the beginning. It's the baby step.

Commissioner Cason: Twelve years later.

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes, exactly. Listen, last time this issue came up, I voted against annexation, when the issue came to a final decision to this body, and it passed and that's okay. That was based on the information I had then. And all this is, is a decision to start that process, get more information, find out where things are today; property values have obviously changed significantly over the last few years, and then whoever is sitting up here when the decision finally comes back for ultimate decision, we'll have the benefit of all that information and we'll make a decision accordingly. I'm always for having a transparent process and going through the motions to get information. I don't have a problem with starting this process today.

Commissioner Cason: I'd like to make a motion to move forward.

Vice Mayor Mena: Second.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Cason: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Lago: Thank you.