

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-13
August 27, 2024
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, Amos Rojas, Jr.

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz

Mayra Jolie

Agenda Item F-13 [5:04 p.m.]

Update on the clock installation on Miracle Mile
(Sponsored by Commissioner Fernandez)

Mayor Lago: Moving onto the final item before we move onto our time certain and I apologize we're late, F-13.

Commissioner Fernandez: The clock on Miracle Mile – I had spoken to the Clerk, and he hadn't heard much about it. I saw the post on social media that it's been installed, but I did have a couple of questions. We had approved the clock manufacturers donation to the city and the Mayor was going to pay for the installation. The post that I saw said that you had donated the clock to the city. Did you actually end up buying it?

Mayor Lago: I paid for a portion of the clock, yes. They gave me a good discount for it.

Commissioner Fernandez: [Members speaking over each other]

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Mayor Lago: Okay. Let's go back. Hold on a second. Let's go back. I am donating a clock, an FP Journe clock to the City of Coral Gables for its Centennial. It's a clock that's worth almost \$100,000. My colleague to the left, Ariel Fernandez, Commissioner Fernandez, required that I spend the \$32,000 to install that clock and pay for a permit here in the city when we requested that it would be done by the city and paid by the city.

Commissioner Fernandez: When did I require that?

Mayor Lago: Let me finish.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Clerk.

Mayor Lago: Let me finish.

Commissioner Fernandez: Did I ever make that request?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Castro: It was me that I asked who was going to be paying for it.

Mayor Lago: And you voted for it, but you voted for it, you voted for it.

Commissioner Fernandez: You volunteered to pay for it.

Mayor Lago: Because I had no choice because you were going to vote against it, so I decided to pay for it, because you were going to nix the clock if I didn't pay for it. So, I took the stand to say, you know what, I want to give the city a beautiful gift on its Centennial and do something that is positive for the city. Again, it's the conversation we had right now about my assistant being nixed on the Commission, it's the same thing as always. So, my point is that I ended up paying for the permit. I ended up paying for the design. I ended up paying for the construction. I ended up paying for all the work that had to be done there, and I have some amazing, by the way, I was not allowed to use my firm as a general contractor or my firm to be able to use as the engineering. It had to be used by separate entities and that's all-public record. There were inspections, everything was done. So, you can search it and ask the Clerk to give you a copy of that. What you have here is a beautiful, exceptional gift to the city that other areas like Rodeo Drive have, other areas in New York, Italy, France, and is something that is going to draw people to our community and if you get a chance you can drive by and see it. September 11th everyone is welcome to come at 6 o'clock and the owners of the clock manufacturer will be there and it will be a wonderful opportunity to see the unveiling of this clock which will be given to the city, its already given to the city because its already installed, along with all the work that was done to it, as gift for the Centennial from my family to the City Beautiful.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So, number one, we need to figure out what we're going to do with the resolution, because the resolution that was approved is a donation from the clock company to the city; and number two, since this is a donation to the city, this has to go through the City Manager's office for scheduling, which I don't believe it has.

Mayor Lago: But again, its already done. Its happening September 11th, its already done, because that's the only time that they can be here up to the end of the year. And you are more than welcome to come. Listen guys, you are looking ridiculous by constantly battling everything.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor that's Patriot's Day, a day when people lost their lives on 9/11, and you are trying to use it for celebration.

Mayor Lago: I didn't want to do it that day, but that's the only time they could.

Commissioner Fernandez: You should have run it by the rest of the Commission, which is the proper protocol to do it.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, Commissioner.

Commissioner Fernandez: That's the proper protocol.

Mayor Lago: This is a very simple thing. Its September 11th at 6 o'clock. If you'd like to be there, you are more than welcome to be there. All you've been is a hindrance throughout the entire process. What I ask you is, give back to the city, give to the city, write legislation. Don't be so destructive and constantly trying to...

Commissioner Fernandez: Mr. Mayor you have been destroying the city for 12 years. So, let's end it at that.

Mayor Lago: I've been destroying the city, okay.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm going to say this.

Mayor Lago: Its happening September 11th at 6 o'clock. I hope you're there. I hope you're there because it would be...

Commissioner Fernandez: I apologize to all the families of the victims of 9/11 that you are deciding to use that day to promote yourself, because you have taken this away from the city. This is a city event, and you have not invited anybody on the Commission. You did not run the event through the City Manager's office, as is the proper process and now you're saying that you are in charge.

Mayor Lago: The City Manager does not speak to me. How can I speak to the Manager.

Commissioner Fernandez: Again, we're not going to get into your criminal investigation today. That is something completely different.

Mayor Lago: Criminal – Mr. Manager, we're in a criminal investigation now. Amazing. This never ceases to surprise me, but we're moving forward at the end of the day. September 11th its happening.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm going to make a motion to reschedule the event.

Mayor Lago: Okay. Make your motion. Make your motion.

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm going to make a motion to reschedule the event at a date when it is not September 11th and when the City Commission has followed the right process.

Mayor Lago: Are you literally going to stand up there and cut a ribbon for something that you did not partake in, that you did not donate any money, that you made it a hindrance, that you objected every single moment that you could to something that's spectacular as this. Are you literally going to make it all about yourself to just be that destructive, I mean.

Commissioner Fernandez: Mayor, this isn't about me, this all about you and that's a problem, and by the way...

Mayor Lago: About me giving a gift to the city.

Commissioner Fernandez: Every time that you talk down to me and call me Ariel, you are disrespecting the residents who elected me to this dais. So, I'm going to ask you once again to respect the residents who elected me to this seat and the seat the Commissioner is in.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, Commissioner, you are embarrassing yourself.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, Mayor, I have to bring a couple of points home to you, Commissioner. The calls I received after the budget hearing about the level of disrespect on this Commission, including just calling me by Rhonda, I didn't even pay attention to that. It was really brought up to me by residents who called me and couldn't believe the manner in which the rest of you were acting who were present here at the time. I also wasn't contacted about my availability on the night that we had the Town Hall, Commissioner Castro had her Town Hall, so I never had it reserved on my calendar, and I had a conflict because I had to be at another board meeting. Okay. I didn't raise a stink about it. I showed up a little late, but I showed up. So, it's out of balance here and it continues to be out of balance. There are two sets of rules going on. Okay. And we are all part of it. So, if you're in a glass house, please don't be throwing stones.

Commissioner Fernandez: Amen to that.

Commissioner Castro: Was it me who called you Rhonda? If it was, I apologize.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I don't have time to go back and watch these tapes. Its bad enough the first time around, the calls I received after the fact. Residents were not happy about it. So, let's take the high road. Again, what I'm going to ask you to do and stop the destruction. Let's move forward.

Commissioner Fernandez: Your talking points again continue to be the same as the Mayor's. You are using the same language.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No. I'm telling you to take the high road. Look at the agenda.

Commissioner Fernandez: I am taking the high road and I'm taking the road that the residents who have been calling me upset about the selection of September 11th for a city event.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Residents are upset...

Commissioner Fernandez: In the past, the city has always held a Commission meeting on September 11th and a memorial service at the Police and Fire Headquarters, that's the only city event the city has been holding on September 11th, and now we're unveiling...

Mayor Lago: Then don't make it about the city. We'll have the opening. It will be there. The city doesn't have to promote it, just like we did with the annexation discussion. We won't send out an email, we won't it on social media for the city. The city will not partake in it at all, but I still welcome you to come. I still welcome you to join me on September 11th. Its not that I want it that day and even told the individuals from France. I said, I can't, September 11th is a very important day here for us in this community for the entire country. I understand Vince, but I won't be able to come back till December. And I said, well, we'll just do something at 6 o'clock so we can give thanks to all the people that partook, all the subcontractors, all the individuals that invested a year and-a-half of their time to bring this to fruition. Its not like they just dropped a clock in the middle of this community. You had to do plans, you have to get engineering done, you have to hire specific people to come in and do the electrical work, you have people to come in and do the shell work, you have to do structural work, you have people to come in and program the clock, you have people to come in and make sure that everything was done appropriately. A lot of people spent their time. If you don't want it to be about the city, its perfectly fine. It doesn't have to be about the city. We won't even use one city resource. We haven't used one city resource. As a matter of fact, we paid a permit, we paid a permit for it.

Commissioner Fernandez: I withdraw my motion.

Vice Mayor Anderson: This is just a clock. I'm asking for the same respect when it comes around to scheduling meetings.

Commissioner Fernandez: And the Mayor never runs his Town Halls by the rest of us. He schedules them himself and that was a Town Hall that Commissioner Castro scheduled and then we were informed.

Commissioner Castro: A Sunshine.

Commissioner Fernandez: Nobody's schedules were checked.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner, you've been here a year and-a-half now, you've been here a year and-a-half now. You came in saying that you are going to do Town Hall meetings. You did one and you never had one again. So, my point is, if you want me to cater my Town Halls around you, when are you available in November, I'll make sure you can be there.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't need you to cater to anybody.

Mayor Lago: I'll do it. I'll do it for you.

Commissioner Fernandez: I don't need you to cater to anybody.

Mayor Lago: You told me you were going to do your Town Hall meetings, I said, let's do it. Perfect. Do it. You've done one. You never did one again in a year and-a-half. So, I'm asking you now, I'm asking you now. I've been doing them for 12 years, two or four times a year. I'm asking you; I'm going to do one in November before Thanksgiving, would you like me to do it around a day that benefits you. You tell me what day and I will do it but show up.

Commissioner Menendez: The good news is the matter, he withdrew, so we can move onto the next item.

Mayor Lago: But it's a good thing that he brought it up. Everyone is welcome to come.

Commissioner Fernandez: Its not a city event, we cannot promote it anymore.

Mayor Lago: We can promote it, its fine. There are a lot of things that we do that are not city events that we promote.

Commissioner Fernandez: Not be promoting it. That was your commitment to withdraw my motion.

Mayor Lago: Madam City Attorney, Madam City Attorney, if I may. If it is not a city issue, am I allowed to say and invite people in this community to do something.

Commissioner Castro: It is a city issue. There was a resolution that we accepted.

Mayor Lago: One second.

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Commissioner Castro: What's going to happen with that?

City Attorney Suarez: You can invite people to events, certainly, but I think you said that no city resources would be used.

Mayor Lago: They're not. I'm not on print. I'm not on digital. I'm not asking staff to do anything. I'm making a comment. If you'd like to come out on September 11th, we ask everyone to join us. Its going to be a nice event and we are going to celebrate this gift to the city. Everyone is welcome to join us. I look forward to seeing you at 6 o'clock on Ponce and Miracle Mile. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, I have members of the public requesting to speak on the item.

Mayor Lago: Yes ma'am.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Maria Cruz, I guess I have to have the best for last. I consider – Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I consider lying a disrespect. I consider when somebody lies, everything changes in my life. May 23, 2023, item C-4, Mayor's Comments. Mayor Lago: Can we do item C-4 really quick; I'd like to see if we can get just a quick photo that I brought. So, this is something that is being offered to the city. I've been to see it already in person. We have some renderings that were professionally done. This is a watch company called FP Journe. I don't own one of their watches, I wish I did. Hopefully one day, I will, but its something that I thought was beautiful. I bring it to the Commission to kind of bring a little bit more cache and quality to the downtown. This is just an idea. If you like the way it looks, they would pay for it all, it wouldn't cost the city anything, and if you look the quality, forget it, they will pay everything. Then the next one is, a very boutique watch company, and I recommend that you look it up and get an idea. There are just ideas of placement where it would go. Then we go farther down. Mayor Lago again: my thought is main on main. It could be, obviously an opportunity to enjoy something that again is being donated to the city. It doesn't cost the city anything, except for maybe some of the infrastructure; electrical to run adjacent. You probably can make a run, but the actual clock is from what I understand is like about \$50,000 donation to the city. Mayor Lago asked for the Commission to accept it. So funny that Mr. Fernandez was the one that made the motion. The resolution is here. Mrs. City Attorney, you can read the sentence. The resolution says, whereas, FP Journe, well-renowned boutique watch maker that produces only 800 watches a year, approached the city with a proposal to donate a clock to the city; and whereas, the City Commission is interested in projects that further beautify the downtown area and create tourist attractions; and whereas, the City Commission desires to accept the FP Journe clock and have city staff work on possible locations for the installation of the donation somewhere in the heart of the city's downtown. Now, therefore be it resolved by the Transportation Board, I don't know what that has to do with this, that the foregoing whereas clauses are hereby ratified and confirmed as being true and correct and hereby made a specific part

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of this resolution. That the City Commission accepts the donation of a clock from FP Journe and directs the City Manager to provide the City Commission with recommendations for placement options. I'm sorry Madam.

Mayor Lago: Excuse me Ms. Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: This resolution does not say the Mayor is donating.

City Attorney Suarez: I didn't say that.

Mrs. Cruz: I'm sorry, the city accepted.

Mayor Lago: May I finish.

Mrs. Cruz: The company to donate. I think this resolution and the proposal are completely different. I'm sorry, you all did not accept the donation from the Mayor and I'm sorry for the Mayor to say, this is not a city thing, and he can do whatever he wants is wrong. Its not a city thing. The city accepted the donation and now I am donating it. I'm sorry, this resolution is invalid, so the donation hasn't been accepted.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, two points for the record. A donation is a donation, whether its paid or its not paid. Stop. Stop for a second, please. You don't have the floor. Ms. Cruz, you don't have the floor. I'm asking you respectfully, we gave you more than enough time to speak. I'm asking you, please sit down.

Mrs. Cruz: No, I'm going to answer. You published your family is donating it, that's not what the city accepted. I'm sorry, I would like to challenge this. This is not what you all accepted. You all need to change your mind.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz. Ms. Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: This is not what you all accepted.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Cruz, my family is donating it, because when you say a donation, the infrastructure, the things that I had to pay to get the watch installed which Commissioner Castro required because at that point we were trying to get the city to pay for the installation, it was \$32,000, my colleagues on the Commission, except for the Vice Mayor, was willing to accept it. So, at the end of the day, to not destroy this wonderful opportunity, I said, don't worry, I'll pay for it. That's it. That's called a donation. When you donate, like I donated yesterday to a charity here in the Gables, I donated money to that charity, so that we can do an event with the police. So, it's a donation. Stop trying to muddy the waters. You are all invited to come September 11th and smile. And the second point is this, September 11th is not a national holiday and its not a holiday and its not a holiday in the city or in the state, and I asked the Clerk for that information. So, it's not a

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national holiday, at the end of the day. So, let's move forward. It's a day that is incredibly important to this community and to this country, but its not a national holiday.

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

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Ms. Mayra Jolie.

Ms. Jolie: Hello.

Mayor Lago: Hello.

Ms. Jolie: Okay. Okay. I gladly will take the clock, whomever paid for that, that's fine, but if the people who manufacture the clock cannot be in the United States but for September 11th, they don't have to be here. They donated – the right hand doesn't have to know what the left hand is doing. If they donated it, they don't need the accolades and they don't need to have all the cameras showing, look how good I am. I'm the equivalent of the Statue of Liberty because its France giving something for the City of Coral Gables. That is disingenuous Mr. Lago. September 11th is not a national holiday, its our holiday. You know what happened on September 11th and it's not a day to celebrate. It's a day for remembrance. If the French people doesn't have to know what happened on September 11th and they don't want to commemorate its fine, but you are saying that the only day that they are available is September 11th, and that' why this is taking place. That is very disingenuous. So if you want to do a party for the French people and then you want to have a monument saying, the family gave it to the City of Coral Gables, that's fine, but tell me that we are going to move everything around just to have the people in France be here when they can't be here so they can use it just to go party. I agree with Ms. Cruz. This is very disingenuous. She has more information that I could ever have, but you guys are really pushing it, and the whole thing about tit for tat or I did it for you or whatever, just think about the residents. Will you be able to just move everything around just because one resident cannot make it one day or they can't make it on that specific day – no. The French people are not American, they don't live in Coral Gables. I don't care if they gave it to the city. I'm sure they want the accolades. If they want to give more clocks, go to Liberty City and give it to them, that is more apropos. Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I appreciate you. Okay.

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